THE TREY O'HEARTS

LOUIS · JOSEPH · VANCE

Geo. wm. Parker

THE TREY O' HEARTS

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

EXTRAVAGANZAS

The Day of Days
Terence O'Rourke
The Pool of Flame

ROMANCES

The Lone Wolf
The Destroying Angel
The Bandbox
Cynthia-of-the-Minute
No Man's Land
The Fortune Hunter
The Bronze Bell
The Black Bag
The Brass Bowl

JOAN THURSDAY: A NOVEL

A GIRL AND A HALF-BREED FOLLOWED HIS EVERY MOVEMENT.

THE TREY O' HEARTS

A Motion-Picture Melodrama

BY

LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

Author of "The Lone Wolf," etc.

Illustrated with photographs from the picture-play production by the Universal Film Manufacturing Company

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PREFACE

THE work between these covers, however grave its many faults and shortcomings, was penned with a single aim, to wit, to compose a story susceptible to adaptation to motion-picture purposes. Its brazen impudence in respect of probability was demanded by the fact that each episode of the fifteen here presented must of necessity embrace sufficient moving incident to warrant some two thousand feet of film exhibiting from ninety to one hundred and twenty animated scenes.

It is offered in its present form mainly for the amusement of those who in common with the author liked the pictures, who conceived a fondness for the several characters: for the dashing, impish *Judith*, and the brave, long-suffering *Rose* so admirably portrayed and differentiated by Miss Cleo Madison; for the gallant if persecuted *Alan*, who could never have been played by any one lacking the cool-headed daring and good-will of Mr. George Larkin; for that frigid villain, *Seneca Trine*, as delineated by the always amiable Mr. Edward Sloman; for that notorious bad-shot of unremitting ubiquity and everlasting stupidity, *Marrophat*, as played (with blank

cartridges) by Mr. Ray Hanford; and for the cynically devoted *Barcus* of Mr. Thomas Walsh.

If the work is lacking in the quality known as characterization, the fault is all the author's: if the picture were not, the merit is all the players'. But the work of both would have gone for nothing without the never-failing patience, ingenuity, and intelligence of Mr. Wilfred Lucas, who directed the production of the pictures.

(The author would be guilty of high treason to his kind if he forgot the traditional feud between author and adaptor long enough to give any credit whatsoever to Miss Bess Meredyth, the scenario-writer, who minced the stories into such scene-fodder as is most palatable to the reeling camera.)

The thanks of the author and his publishers are due to the Universal Film Manufacturing Company for permission to reproduce the "still pictures" of scenes in the production here presented as illustrations.

L. J. V.

Los Angeles, California,
October, 1, 1914.

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THE TREY O' HEARTS

THE TREY O' HEARTS

CHAPTER I

The Message of the Rose

LAPPED deep in the leather-bound luxury of an ample lounge-chair, walled apart from the world by the portentous silences and venerable solitude of the library of London's most exclusive club, Mr. Alan Law sprawled (largely on the nape of his neck), and, squinting discontentedly down his nose, plotted in furtherance of his own selfish ends.

He was exhaustively bored.

He had every legitimate reason to be bored. He had squeezed the orange of amusement dry and had nothing else to do but be bored. And this was England, this was June, this was his twenty-seventh summer; a combination of circumstances so alluring that with almost any other right-minded man it would have proved resistless.

He was, outwardly, a very ordinary person; that is to say, normally sane and good looking, well mannered, well cared for, well dressed. In other respects

his was a singular personality. Since childhood he had worked hard, for no good reason that he could see, at learning his duty (and pleasure) in that state of life into which it had pleased God to call him—but he had yet to earn an honest penny. He was master of a dozen-odd arts and crafts which had thus far rewarded him with nothing but ennui. He possessed and maintained in prime condition the body of an athlete, which served him to no particular end. He knew more about most things, from cabbages to kings, than did ninety-nine out of every hundred denizens of his world, but he didn't know how to avoid boredom. The sum of his wisdom on this subject was to the effect that ennui was inescapable; being good was frightfully wearing on one; misbehaving was worse.

Normally, Mr. Law did behave himself; he was made of the stuff that riches cannot spoil. Left to himself, he would far rather stand at the wheel of a motor boat than beside that of a roulette layout; he preferred playing polo to playing the ponies; hitting the high spots along Montmartre was less amusing, in his esteem, than sailing comfortably over them at an altitude of several thousand feet; while it was never his notion of fun to gulp bromo seltzer as an antidote for last night, and then cocktails to counteract the antidote.

But there were times when it was strongly borne

in upon him that he must either break out in some unique and spontaneous manner or blow up. At such times history was apt to be manufactured in bulk. And this—this day of an English June—was one of those times. Mr. Queux was uneasily aware of the unrest simmering within him; very much, no doubt, as Vesuvius is periodically conscious of its divine discontent.

His chair stood by an open window, below which lay an old English garden in full flower, the property of the club and its boast. Through the window a half-hearted breeze wafted gusts of air soporific and heavy with the breath of roses.

Mr. Law drank deep of it, and in spite of his spiritual unrest, sighed slightly and shut his eyes.

An unspoken word troubled the deeps of his consciousness, so that old memories stirred and struggled to its surface. The word was "Rose," and for the time seemed to be the name neither of a woman nor a flower, but oddly of both, as though the two things were one.

He wondered idly why this was so until his mental vision, bridging the gap of a year, conjured up the picture of a lithe, sweet silhouette in white, with red roses at her belt, posed on a terrace of the Riviera against the burning Mediterranean blue.

Mr. Law was dully conscious that he ought to be

sorry about something. But he was really very drowsy indeed. And so he fell quietly asleep.

The clock was striking four when he awoke, and before closing his eyes he had noticed that its hands indicated ten minutes to four. So he could not have slept long, if quite long enough to dream of a girl in white, with red roses at her belt, waiting for him on a pierhead in New York harbour.

And he came to smiling a gentle smile that slowly as consciousness cleared gave place to an impatient frown due to the reminder that he was to all intents an outlaw from America, and then by a look of downright bewilderment, due in turn to realization of a minor miracle that had come to pass while he dreamed.

For some few seconds Alan rested as he was, incredulously regarding the rose which had materialized so mysteriously upon the little table at his elbow. He was sure it had not been there when he closed his eyes, and almost as sure that it was not real. What right, indeed, had a red rose to trespass upon the solidly respectable and imaginative precincts of a British club library? Beyond reasonable doubt it was nothing more or less than the figment of a supersentimentalized imagination worked upon by the magic fragrance of the rose garden.

Then of a sudden he sat bolt upright.

In defiance of the injunction that glared at him

from every reading table in the room—letters of gold on a black ground, neatly framed:

SILENCE!

Mr. Law announced with the emphasis of absolute conviction:

"Well, I'm damned!"

He touched the rose. It was real beyond all question; a warm red rose, fresh plucked. When impulsively he took it by the stem, he discovered a most indisputable thorn—which did service for the traditional pinch.

Thus persuaded that he was not still dreaming, Mr. Law jumped up from his chair and glared suspiciously round the room. A practical joke in that solemn atmosphere was a thing unthinkable; still, there was the rose.

But the room was empty aside from himself and the rose.

Impulsively he struck a call-bell—and repented, haunted by the fear of making himself ridiculous. It was inconceivable that he should demand of the waiter then approaching, "Who, while I slept, made me a present of this rose?"

The waiter entered to find the member leaning nonchalantly against the table, drawing on his gloves.

"You rang, sir?"

"I did. Ah—waiter, I've been asleep, you know."

"Thank you, sir."

"Only a minute or two, of course."

"Quite so, sir."

"I wish to know if anybody entered this room while I was asleep."

"I couldn't say, sir—unless it might 'ave been Mr. Marrophat. 'E's the only other gentleman on this floor of the club-'ouse at present, sir."

"Marrophat? But I don't know him!"

"Thank you, sir."

"Still . . . where is he?"

"In the writing-room, sir."

"Thanks."

"Thank you, sir."

"Marrophat? No fear!" Mr. Law assured himself as the waiter left the room.

On the other hand, roses are not introduced into London's most exclusive clubs without some human sponsor.

On his way out Law glanced through the door of the writing-room, and was confirmed in his incredulity. Mr. Marrophat, stodgily rounded over a desk in the corner, was the incarnate genius of superfatted British dignity. Impossible to credit him with anything resembling a sense of humour—or any such spirit of romantic mischief as might prompt one to distribute roses to one's fellow club members.

Perplexed, Alan fled the club, pausing by force of habit only long enough to consult the letter-rack and annex an envelope he found there addressed to him.

It was a white envelope of good quality. The address was typewritten, the stamp English, with a London postmark, half illegible.

Mr. Law tore the envelope open in an absent-minded fashion, and started as if stung. The inclosure was a simple playing card—a Trey of Hearts!

In the writing-room Mr. Marrophat continued to compose. The mental exertion caused him to breathe rather heavily. His colourless thick lips were compressed as if to restrain his tongue from aping the antics of his pen. His starting eyes followed the ink scratches on the telegraph blank with a look of mildly anguished surprise.

In point of fact, he wasn't writing; he was laboriously printing the following words:

"Senex, New York—Rose uttered 3:58 P. M. Trey followed. A. much disturbed. M. P. T."

When he had finished, Mr. Marrophat waved the blank to and fro until the ink was dry. This was not for want of a blotter, but because blotters have been known to reveal secrets when read in a mirror.

Nor was it because the club lacked servants that Mr. Marrophat presently got up, folded his cable message, waddled forth, and proceeded to commit it to the nearest office with his own trustworthy fat hands.

As for Alan Law, he wandered down Pall Mall in a state of daze; he went toward Trafalgar Square. He didn't know where he was going, or even that he was on his way, and he didn't care. For all that, no one who chanced to observe him would have dreamed that he was preoccupied with questioning his own mental integrity; but the hypothetical observer would have shared his misgiving had he suspected that Mr. Law was wearing a rose inside his top hat, to say nothing of a three spot of hearts in the breast pocket of his admirable morning coat.

He could, of course, read quite well the message of the rose. He would not soon forget that year-old parting with his Rose of the Riviera:

"You say you love me but may not marry me—and we must never see each other again. Then promise this, that if ever you change your mind, you'll send for me."

And her promise: "I will send you a rose."

But a year had lapsed with never a sign from her, so that he had grown accustomed to the unflattering belief that she had forgotten him.

And now the sign had come—but in a fashion so

strange that he hesitated to accept it. It wouldn't do to jump at conclusions and make one's self ridiculous. Very probably it hadn't come from her at all, but was just an everyday coincidence.

But there was that Trey of Hearts! Now what the deuce did the Trey of Hearts mean?

Now in heraldry the word Trine signifies a group of three. And the Trey of Hearts is a group of three. And the surname of that Rose of his heart's desire was Trine.

Was the card then simply her way of fixing beyond question the identity of the sender of the rose?

Alan ambled aimlessly into Cockspur Street, and of a sudden found himself at a dead halt, transfixed by a poster in one of the show windows.

The poster advertised the newest steamship in the trans-Atlantic service, and the artist had seen fit to delineate his subject at the moment of drawing away from a pierhead in the foreground, on which pierhead a young woman was shown waving a farewell handkerchief—a lithe, sweet silhouette in white with red roses at her belt posed against a sea of burning blue.

Mr. Law drew an incredulous, lemon-gloved hand across his bewildered forehead.

"Three times in the same place in thirty minutes!" he muttered blankly. "There's something uncanny about this . . . If life itself were not a riddle

without a reading—I'd begin to believe in the supernatural! As it is——"

When he entered his rooms that evening to dress for dinner it was to find an American Beauty rose ornamenting his dressing-table, pinned to a Trey of Hearts.

Interrogated, his valet deposed ignorance of the matter.

When Alan returned from dinner and the theatre, it was to find a solitary rose reposing with blushing effrontery upon his pillow. The inevitable Trey of Hearts, it appeared, had crawled in between the covers.

That made three of each.

Mr. Law sat down and thought. Then he summoned his valet—and discharged him.

"The Lord," he said, "may love a liar. But I'm human. Here's a month's wages. Clear out of this in three minutes. . . ."

When morning came, London had lost Alan Law. No man—nor any woman—had received warning of his disappearance. He was simply vanished from English ken.

CHAPTER II

The Sign of the Three

OUT of doors, high noon, spring, the clamorous life of New York swift running through its brilliant streets.

Within doors, neither sound nor sunbeam disturbed a perennial quiet that was yet not peace.

The room was like a well of night, the haunt of shadows and sinister silences. Heavy hangings darkened its windows and masked its doors, a carpet of velvet muffled its floor, bookcases lined its walls. From the topmost shelves pale sculptured masks peered down, incarnadined by the dim glow from a solitary light that burned in that darkness like a smouldering ember.

The electric bulb of ruby glass was focussed upon a leather-bound desk-blotter on a black desk whose farther edges blended with the shadows.

Little was visible beyond the radius of that light and the figure of an old man that brooded over it, motionless in a great leather-bound chair.

His hair was as white as his heart was black; his nose was aquiline, finely chiselled, his cheek-bones

high and sharp. His mouth resembled a steel trap; while his forehead shelved back sharply from ragged black brows that shadowed eyes like live coals.

He was clothed in a black dressing-gown, and from the thighs down was covered by a woollen rug. He stared unblinking at the crimson blotter: a man seven eighths dead, completely paralyzed but for his head and his left arm.

A figure of savage patience he sat waiting—for years on end, for so long that those who knew him had well-nigh forgotten that Seneca Trine once had been as vital a creature as ever lived.

Presently a faint clicking disturbed the stillness. Seneca Trine had put forth his left hand and touched a button embedded in the desk. Something else clicked—this time a latch. There was the faint sound of a closing door, the hangings rustled, and a smallish man in black stole into the light, paused beside the desk, and waited for leave to speak.

The voice of Trine rang like a bell in the silence, a weirdly deep and sonorous voice to issue from that wasted frame.

"Well?"

"A telegram, sir—from England."

"Give it me!"

The old man seized the sheet of yellow paper, scanned it hungrily, and crushed it with a gesture of

uncontrollable emotion. His voice rang with exultation when next he spoke:

"Send my daughter Judith here!"

The servant disappeared, and two minutes later a young woman in street dress was admitted to the chamber of the shadows. She went directly to her father, bent over and touched her lips to his forehead.

He did not speak, but her quick ears caught the rustle of the paper crushed anew in his grasp, and she experienced an intuition of something momentous impending.

"You sent for me, father?"

He replied brusquely: "Sit down."

She found a chair and settled herself in it.

"Now turn the light upon your face."

The red glow lighted up a face of exquisite beauty, an eager, passionate face mirroring the spirit of quenchless youth, and her father nodded slightly as if with satisfaction.

"Judith—tell me—what day is this?"

"My birthday. I am twenty-one."

"And your sister's birthday? Rose, too, is twenty-one."

A slight frown clouded Judith's face; but she replied quietly: "Yes."

"You could have forgotten that," the old man pursued almost mockingly. "Do you dislike your twin-sister so intensely?"

The girl's voice trembled. "You know," she said, "I hate and despise her."

"Why?"

"We have nothing in common—beyond parentage and this abominable resemblance. Our natures differ as light from darkness."

"And which would you say was—light?"

"Hardly my own: I'm no hypocrite. Rose is everything that they tell me my mother was, while I"—the girl smiled strangely—"I think—I am more *your* daughter than my mother's."

A nod of the white head confirmed the suggestion. "It is true. I have watched you closely, Judith. Before I was brought to this"—the wasted hand made a significant gesture—"I was a man of strong passions. . . . Your mother never loved, but rather feared, me. And Rose is the mirror of her mother's nature: gentle, unselfish, sympathetic. But you, Judith, you are like a second self to me."

An accent of satisfaction was in his voice. The girl waited, tensely expectant.

"Then, if I were to ask a service of you that might injuriously affect the happiness of your sister——"

The girl laughed briefly: "Only ask it!"

"And how far would you go to do my will——"

"Where would you stop in the service of one you loved?"

Seneca Trine permitted himself an odd mirthless

TRINE SUSPECTED HIS WIFE. OF WHAT, HE COULD NOT TELL.

ON THIS DAY LAW, SR., WENT DOWN TO FINANCIAL DEFEAT.

chuckle. "I know," he said, "I know." And after a brief pause: "Rose is in love," he announced obliquely.

The girl half-started from her chair, but with visible effort controlled herself.

"Oh, I know—I know!" the father continued. "I am a prisoner of this living tomb; but all things I should know—somehow—in time—I come to know."

"It's true—that Englishman last year—what's his name?—Law, Alan Law."

"In the main," the father corrected, "you are right. Only he's not English. His father was Wellington Law, the banker."

She knew better than to interrupt, but her seeming patience was belied by the whitening knuckles of a hand that lay within the little pool of blood-red light.

Presently the deep voice rolled on: "Law and I were once friends; then—we loved one woman, your mother. I won her—all but her heart: too late she realized it was Law she loved. He never forgave me, nor I him. Though he married another woman, still he held from me the love of my wife. I could not sleep for hating him—and he was no better off. Each sought the other's ruin; it came to be an open duel between us in Wall Street. One of us had to fail—and I held the stronger hand. The night before the day that was to have seen my triumph I walked in Central Park, as was my habit, to tire my body

so that my brain might sleep. I was struck by a motor-car, picked up insensible—and lived only to be what I am. Law triumphed in the Street while I lay helpless; only a remnant of my fortune remained to me. Then his chauffeur, discharged, came to me and sold me the truth; it was Law's car with Law at the wheel that had struck me down—a deliberate attempt at assassination. I sent Law word that I meant to have a life for a life. For what was I better than dead? I promised him that, should he escape, I would have the life of his son. He knew I meant it, and sent his wife and son abroad. Then he died suddenly—I believe from fear of me."

Trine smiled. "I had made his life a reign of terror. Ever so often I would send him—mysteriously always—a Trey of Hearts: it was my death-sign for him. Every time he received a Trey of Hearts, within twenty-four hours an attempt of some sort would be made upon his life. The strain broke down his nerve. . . .

"Then I turned my attention to the son, but the Law millions mocked my efforts; their alliance with the Rothschilds placed mother and son under the protection of every secret police in Europe, but they dared not come home. At length I realized that I must wait game. I needed three things: more money; to bring Alan Law back to America; and an incorruptible agent. I ceased to persecute mother

and son, and by careful speculations repaired my fortunes. In Rose I had the lure to draw the boy back to America; in you, the one person I could trust.

"I sent Rose abroad under an assumed surname and arranged that she should meet Law. They fell in love at sight. Then I wrote her that the man she had chosen was the son of him who had murdered all of me but my brain. It fell out as I foresaw: she broke off with Law without telling him the truth. You can imagine the scene—passionate renunciation—pledges of constancy—the arrangement of a secret code whereby, when she needed him, she would send him a single rose—the birth of a great romance!"

The old man laughed sardonically. "Well . . . the rose has been sent; Law is already homeward bound; my agents are watching his every step. The rest is in your hands."

The girl bent forward, her eyes aflame in a pallid face.

"What is it you want of me?" she asked in a vibrant voice.

"Bring Alan Law to me. Dead or alive, bring him to me. But alive, if you can compass it: I wish to see him die."

The hand of youth grasped the icy hand of death-in-life.

"I will bring him," Judith swore. "Dead or alive, you shall have him here."

CHAPTER III

The Trail of Treachery

BUT young Mr. Law was sole agent of his own evanishment. The reason for his life in exile was well known to him, if largely a matter of indifference since his friendships had taken root in English soil. The message of the Rose he understood perfectly; but the hidden meaning of the Trey of Hearts so perplexed him that before leaving London he dispatched a cablegram to Digby, his confidential agent in New York:

"*What do you know about the Trey of Hearts? Answer immediately.*"

Digby's answer forestalled Alan's arrival in Liverpool:

"*Trey of Hearts was Trine's death-sign for your father. For God's sake keep away from America.*"

But Alan had more than once visited America incognito and unknown to Seneca Trine; and had

confidence in his ability successfully to repeat the adventure—via a route of his own selection.

Eight days out of London, a second-class passenger newly landed from one of the C.-P. steamships, he walked the streets of Quebec, and dropped out of sight between dark and dawn, to turn up in the Canadian hamlet of Baie St. Paul, apparently a tenderfoot American woods-traveller chaperoned by a taciturn Indian guide.

Crossing the St. Lawrence by night, the two struck off into the hinterland of the Notre Dame range, followed the Riviere Ouelle to its headwaters, and then crossed the Maine border.

On the second noon thereafter, trail-worn and weary, the two paused on a ridge-pole of the wilderness up back of the Allagash country, and made their midday meal in a silence which, if normal in the Indian, was one of deep misgiving on Alan's part.

Continually his gaze questioned the northern skies that lowered portentously, foul with the smoke of a county-wide conflagration that threatened unless soon checked to lay waste all northern Maine bone-dry with drought.

And the fires were making southward far faster than man might hope to travel through that grim and stubborn land. Even as he stared, Alan saw fresh columns of dun-coloured smoke spring up as

the flames, spurred by a freshening wind, made league-consuming strides.

Anxiously he consulted the Indian. But his questions gained Alan little comfort from Jacob, who said that rain alone could stop the flames. After recommending forced marches to bring them by to-morrow's noon to the spot he called Spirit Lake, where canoes might be found to aid their flight, the Indian withdrew into sullen reserve.

They travelled far and fast before sundown, then again paused for food and rest. As Jacob set about preparing the meal, Alan stumbled off to whip the little trail-side stream for trout.

Perhaps a hundred yards upstream, the back-lash of a careless cast hooked the State of Maine. Too tired even to remember the appropriate words, Alan scrambled ashore, forced through the undergrowth that masked the trail, found his fly, set the State of Maine free, and swinging on his heel brought up standing, transfixed by the discovery of a rectangle of white pasteboard fixed to the trunk of a sapling: a Trey of Hearts, of which each pip had been neatly punctured by a .22 calibre bullet.

Nor had it been long there: when Alan scrutinized it he found the card innocent of weather-stains, the pin unrusted that held it, the wounds in the sapling raw and damp.

He carried it back to camp, meaning to consult

the guide, but on second thought reconsidered. It was not likely that the Indian had overlooked the inevitable traces of human neighbours that must have been apparent to his woods-sharpened wits. So Alan waited for him to speak, and meantime determined to watch him narrowly, though no other suspicious circumstance had marked their association. It might turn out to be simply chance which had thrown that sinister card in his path.

The first half of the night was devoted to relentless progress southward. There could be no more question as to the need for urgent haste: overhead the north wind muttered; thin veils of smoke drifted through the forest, and ever the curtained heavens glared with reflected fires.

By midnight Alan had passed the limit of his endurance. Though Jacob declared that Spirit Lake was now only six hours distant, as far as concerned Alan he might have said six hundred. They camped in perfunctory fashion. His blanket once unrolled, Alan dropped upon it like one drugged.

The sun was high when he awakened and sat up, wondering what had come over the Indian to let him sleep so late. This was soon made clear. Jacob had absconded, leaving Alan barely food enough for a cold breakfast.

Overnight the fire had made tremendous gains. The nearness of his peril dwarfed the treachery of the

Indian. Alan delayed long enough to swallow a few mouthfuls of raw food, gulped water from a spring, and set out at a dog-trot on the trail to Spirit Lake.

For hours he blundered on, holding to the trail mainly by instinct—the roaring of the flames ever more loud and ominous, the cloud of smoke ever more dense, the heat moment by moment more intense.

Finally he staggered into a little clearing, tripped over some obstacle, and plunged headlong, so bewildered that he could not have said whether he was tripped or thrown. As he fell a heavy body landed on his back and crushed him savagely to earth.

In less than a minute he was overcome, his wrists hitched together, his ankles bound. When his vision cleared he discovered Jacob squatting on his heels and regarding him with a face as immobile as the bronze it resembled.

Beyond, a woman in a man's hunting costume stood eying the captive as narrowly as the Indian, but with a countenance that seemed exultantly aglow over his downfall.

But for that look he could have believed the face that which had brought him overseas: feature for feature, she counterfeited the woman he loved; only those eyes, aflame with their look of inhuman ruthlessness, denied that the two were one.

He sought to speak. The breath rustled in his throat like wind whispering among dead leaves.

THEY HAD CRUSHED THEIR MAN . . . THEIR FILTHY WORK WAS DONE.

THE FACE IN THE LOCKET BROUGHT MEMORIES OF WONDERFUL DAYS NOW PAST.

Thrusting the Indian aside, the woman knelt by Alan's head.

"So!" she said sweetly. "So, Mr. Alan Law!"

He made no effort to reply; the thought in his mind was that in those eyes was less of madness than of inhumanity; that this was less a creature bereft of reason than one brought into the world without a soul.

"No," she said, smiling cruelly, "I am not your Rose. But I am her sister Judith, born in the same hour, daughter of—— Can you guess whose daughter?"

He shook his head.

"You thought it a girl's romantic nonsense that made Rose refuse you because of a secret barrier between you! But see this!" She held a card before his eyes. "You know it? The Trey of Hearts—the symbol of Trine—Trine, your father's enemy, and yours, and—Rose's father and mine!"

A gust of wind like a furnace blast swept the glade. The woman sprang up, glanced over-shoulder into the forest, and signed to the Indian.

"In ten minutes," she said, "these woods will be your funeral pyre."

Jacob picked Alan up and strode into the forest. Ten feet from the clearing he dropped the helpless man upon a bed of dry logs and branches.

Then, with a single movement, he disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

Flower o' the Flame

OVERHEAD, through the foliage, a sky was visible whose ebon darkness called to mind a thundercloud. Beneath it veils and whorls of smoke fled athwart the wreck. The heat was nearly intolerable; the voice of the fire was loud—snappings and cracklings and sharp detonations making an embroidery of sound upon a texture of sustained roaring like that of surf.

A heavy crashing made Alan turn his head, and he saw a terrified bear break cover and plunge on into the farther thickets.

Two minutes had passed of the ten when a sharp crackling brought him suddenly to a sitting position, to find that the Indian had touched a match to the pyre before departing. At Alan's feet the twigs were blazing merrily.

It would have been easy to snatch his limbs away, but another thought was in his mind: he did not move more than to strain his feet apart as far as their bonds permitted. He was conscious of scorching heat even through his cowhide hunting boots;

but a minute sufficed: within its span a tongue of flame licked up, wrapped itself round the hempen cord, and ate it through. Immediately Alan kicked his feet free and crawled from the pyre.

As for his hands—Alan's hunting-knife was still in its sheath belted to the small of his back. Tearing at the belt with his hampered fingers, he contrived to shift it round within comparatively easy reach. Withdrawing and conveying the blade to his mouth, he gripped it between his teeth and severed the cords round his wrists.

Already the glare was silhouetting the trees not a hundred yards away. Before Alan could turn and run he saw the flames bridge fifty yards at a bound and set a dead pine blazing.

And then he was pelting like a madman across the clearing. Presently the trail branched right and left; Alan darted to the left at a venture, and soon broke from the forest to the shore of a lake, within a few hundred feet of the dam that choked its outlet—a substantial dam, well-banked and timbered, through whose spillway a heavy volume of water cascaded with a roar.

A glance showed Alan that his only way of escape was via the dam, and that there was a canoe at mid-lake bearing to the farther shore Judith Trine and the Indian. Suddenly Jacob turned his head sharply and dropped the paddle. The next instant a bullet

from a Winchester .30 kicked up the pebbles a few feet in advance of Alan.

He quickened his pace; the next bullet fell closer, while the third actually bit the earth beneath his running feet as he gained the dam. Exasperated, he pulled up, whipped out his pistol and fired without aim. And he noted that the distance between dam and canoe had lessened perceptibly, thanks to the strong current sucking through the spillway.

His shot flew wide, but instinctively his finger closed again upon the trigger, and coincident with the report he saw the paddle in the bow of the canoe snap in twain, its blade falling overboard. Then the Indian fired again, his bullet droning past Alan's ear. As he fired in response Jacob started, dropped his rifle into the lake, clawed at his throat, and crumpled up in the bow of the canoe.

Alan turned and ran along the dam toward two heavy timbers that bridged the spillway.

Then a glance aside brought him up with a thrill of horror: the suck of the overflow had drawn the canoe within a hundred yards of the spillway. The dead Indian in its bow, the living woman helpless in its stern, it swept onward to destruction.

A moment later Alan found himself at the brink of the spillway, staring down into a chasm thirty feet in depth, wherein the cascade broke upon a huddle of jagged boulders.

His next actions were unpremeditated. He ran out upon the bridge, threw himself down upon the innermost timber, and calculated the drop to the glassy brink immediately below—not less than a fathom. And the canoe was now within a hundred feet.

A swift glance gauged its course: Alan turned, dropped his legs in the space between the timbers, and let his body fall backward, arms extended, and swung braced by his feet beneath the outer timber.

He was aware of the canoe hurtling onward, its sharp prow aimed directly for his head. In an instant hands closed around his wrists, a tremulous weight tore at his arms, and with an effort of inconceivable difficulty he began to lift the woman up out of the foaming jaws of death.

Somehow that impossible feat was achieved, somehow the woman gained a hold upon his body and contrived to clamber over him to the timbers, and somehow he in turn pulled himself up to safety. Later he became aware that the woman had crawled to safety on the farther shore; he pulled himself together and imitated her example. Then he discovered the face of Judith Trine close to his, and he heard her voice, barely audible above the voices of conflagration and cascade:

"You fool! Why did you save me? I tell you, I have sworn your death——"

The grotesqueness of it all broke upon him and he laughed hysterically, waving her aside.

"Oh, go to the devil!" he cackled insanely. . . .

Darkness followed. A flash of lightning seemed to flame between them and he lapsed into unconsciousness. . . .

When he roused, it was with a shiver. Rain was falling in torrents. Across the lake clouds of steam enveloped the fires that fainted beneath the deluge. A hissing noise filled the world above the roaring of the spillway.

He was alone.

But in his hand he found—a rose.

CHAPTER V

The Hunted Man

THE day was hot and windless with an unclouded sky, and memories of the dreadful yesterday but deepened the sense of to-day's serenity. In flooding sunlight the woodlands basked and steamed, and a great stillness brooded over all the wilderness.

Long before any sound audible to human ears disturbed the noonday hush, a bobcat sunning on a log in a glade to which no trail led, pricked ears, rose, glanced over-shoulder with a snarl, and—of a sudden—was no more there.

Perhaps two minutes later a succession of remote crashings began to be heard, the sound made by some heavy body forcing a way through the underbrush. Soon a man broke into the clearing and reeled to a seat on the log, shuddering uncontrollably in all his limbs.

He was a young man and had been personable. Just now his face was crimson with congested blood and streaked with sweat and grime; his lips were cracked and swollen, his eyes haggard, his hands bleeding. Woods equipment he had none beyond a

hunting-knife. All else had been consumed in the forest fire or stolen by his Indian guide.

Now the man was lost. After a night passed without a fire he had waked to discover the sun rising in the west and the rest of the universe sympathetically upside-down. Aimlessly, ever since, he had stumbled and blundered—possessed by a notion that he was dogged by furtive enemies—and within the last hour the puppet of blind, witless panic.

Even now, as he strove to calm himself and rest, the feeling that something was peering at him grew intolerably acute. He jumped up, flung himself frantically through the brush in pursuit of the something, and—found nothing.

With a great effort he pulled himself together and turned back to the clearing.

There, upon the log on which he had rested, he found—but refused to believe he saw—a playing card—a Trey of Hearts.

With a gesture of horror Alan Law fled the place.

Then a grinning half-breed guide stole like a shadow to the log, picked up and pocketed the card, and set out in tireless, catfooted pursuit.

An hour later, topping a ridge, Alan caught the music of clashing waters. Tortured by thirst, he began at once to descend in reckless haste. What was at first a gentle slope grew swiftly more declivi-

IN THAT HOUR TRINE SWORE AN AWFUL REVENGE AGAINST LAW.

JUDITH WAS THE PET OF HER FATHER.

tous, bare of underbrush, and sparsely sown with small cedars.

The shelving moss-beds afforded uncertain footing, and the scanty cedar growth but small support. Alan came at headlong pace within sight of the eaves of a cliff, and precisely then the hillside seemed to slip from under him. His heels flourished in the air, his back thumped a bed of pebbles. He began to slide, grasped a puny little cedar which came away in his hand, and amid a shower of stones shot over the edge and down a drop of more than thirty feet. He was aware of the sun, a molten ball wheeling madly in the sky. Then dark waters closed over him.

He came up gasping, and struck out for something dark that rode the waters near at hand—a canoe. But his strength was spent. Within a stroke of an outstretched paddle he flung up a hand and went down.

Instantly one occupant of the canoe, a young and very beautiful woman in a man's hunting clothes, spoke a word of command, and, as her guide steadied the vessel with his paddle, rose carefully in her place and curved her lithe body over the bows, headforemost into the pool.

CHAPTER VI

The Haunting Woman

MR. LAW had endured even more than a weathered woodsman could have borne without suffering. Forty-eight hours of such heavy woods-walking as he had put in to escape the fire would have served to prostrate almost any man; add to this (ignoring a dozen other mental, nervous, and physical strains) the fact that he had been half-drowned. . . . He experienced fever, delirium, then blank slumbers of exhaustion.

He awoke at night, unaware that thirty-six hours had passed since his fall. This last, however, and events that had gone before, he recalled with tolerable clearness. Other memories, more vague, of gentle hands, of a face by turns an angel's and a dear woman's, troubled him even less materially. He was sane enough to know he had been out of his head, and since it seemed he had been saved and cared for, he found no reason to quarrel with present circumstances.

With some difficulty, from a dry throat, he whispered: "Water . . ."

In response he heard some one move over a creaking floor. A sulphur match spluttered. A candle caught fire, silhouetting—illusion, of course!—the figure of a woman. Water splashed. Water splashed noisily. Alan became aware of some one who stood at his side, one hand offering a glass, the other gently raising his head that he might drink.

Draining the glass, he breathed his thanks and sank back, retaining his grasp on the wrist of that unreal hand. The hallucination went so far as to say, in a woman's soft accents:

"You are better, Alan?"

He sighed incredulously: "Rose!"

The voice responded, "Yes!" Then the perfume of roses grew still more strong, and a miracle came to pass: for Mr. Law, who realized poignantly that all this was sheer nonsense, distinctly felt lips like velvet caress his forehead.

He closed his eyes, tightened his grasp on that hand of phantasy, and muttered.

The voice asked: "What is it, dear?"

He responded: "Delirium. . . . But I like it. . . . Let me rave!"

Then again he slept.

CHAPTER VII

Disclosures

IN A little office, in one of lower Manhattan's office-towers, a mouse-brown man sat over a big desk: a little man of big affairs, sole steward of one of America's most formidable fortunes.

At precisely the instant when Alan Law catapulted over the edge of a cliff in northern Maine the signal of the little man's telephone clicked, and, lifting receiver to ear, he nodded with a smile and said, "Ask her to come in at once, please." Jumping up, he placed a chair, the door opened, and a young woman entered.

The mouse-brown man bowed. "Miss Rose Trine?" he murmured.

The young woman returned his bow: "Mr. Digby?"

"You are kind to come in response to my—ah—unconventional invitation," said the little man. "Won't you—ah—sit down?"

She said, "Thank you," gravely, and took the chair he indicated.

"If you will permit me to say so," he said dif-

fidently, "now that one sees you, Miss Trine, it is quite comprehensible why my employer—ah—feels toward you as he does."

The girl flushed. "Mr. Law has told you——?"

"I am his nearest friend on this side, as well as his man of business. So I have ventured to request this—ah—surreptitious appointment in order to—ah—take liberty of asking whether you have recently sent Alan a message."

"I have not communicated with Mr. Law in more than a year!"

"Precisely as I thought," Mr. Digby nodded. "None the less, Mr. Law not long since received what purported to be a message from you: In fact—a rose. I have the information over Mr. Law's signature—a letter received ten days ago—from Quebec."

"Alan in America!" the girl cried in distress.

"In response to—ah—the message of the rose."

"But I did not send it!"

"I felt sure of that," said Mr. Digby, watching her narrowly, "because of something that accompanied the rose, a playing card—a Trey of Hearts."

Her eyes were blank. "I must tell you, I see, that a Trey of Hearts invariably foresignalled an attempt on the life of Alan's father."

Her white lips stammered: "My father——?"

"That is why I sent for you," Mr. Digby pursued. "Alan's letter reached me within twenty-four hours

of his arrival in Quebec, and detailed his scheme to enter the United States secretly—as he puts it, by way of northern Maine—and promised to advise by telegraph as soon as he reached Moosehead Lake. He should have wired me ere this. Frankly, I am anxious about the boy!"

"And I!" the girl exclaimed pitifully. "To think that he should be brought into such peril through me!"

"You can tell me nothing?"

"Nothing—as yet. I did not dream that the message of the rose was known to any but Alan and myself. I cannot understand!"

"I may tell you that your father maintains a very efficient corps of secret agents."

"You think he spied upon me?"

"I *know* he did. In the service of my employer I, too, employ agents of my own. Your father sent you to Europe for the sole purpose of having you meet Alan."

"Oh!" she protested. "But what earthly motive——"

"That Alan might be won back to America through you—and——"

There was no need to finish. The girl was visibly mustering her wits to cope with this emergency.

"I may depend on you," Mr. Digby suggested, "to advise me if——?"

A fine spirit of resolve set her countenance aglow. "You may count on me for action on my part, if circumstances warrant it. I promised not to marry Alan—but not to stand by and see him sacrificed. Tell me how I may communicate secretly with you—and let me go as soon as possible!"

Within the hour Rose Trine stood before her father in that sombre room whose sinister colour-scheme of crimson and black was the true livery of the passion for vengeance that alone kept warm the embers of his deathlike life. Two hours ago she could not have denied him compassion; now she looked down upon him with cold eyes, hardening her heart. When at length he decided to speak, it was with a ring of hateful irony in his strangely sonorous voice.

"Rose, I am told you have been to-day guilty of an act of disloyalty."

She said coolly: "You had me spied upon."

"Naturally, I had you watched."

She dropped an impassive monosyllable: "Well?"

"You have visited the servant and friend of the man I hate—and you love."

She said, without expression: "Yes."

"Repeat what passed between you."

"I shall not, but on one condition."

"And that is——?"

"Tell me whether it was you who sent the rose—and, where is Judith?"

"I shall tell you nothing. Repeat"— the voice rang resolutely—"repeat what Digby told you!"

The girl was silent for a long minute. Then his hand moved toward the row of buttons sunk in the top of his desk.

"I warn you I have ways to make you speak——"

With a quick movement the girl prisoned the bony wrist in her strong fingers. With her other hand she whipped open an upper drawer of the desk and took from it a revolver.

"On the contrary," she said quietly, "the time has passed when you could have me punished for disobedience. You will call nobody; if interrupted I shan't hesitate to defend myself. And now I shall find for myself what I wish to know."

For a moment he watched in silence as she bent over the desk, rummaging its drawers. Then with an infuriated gesture he began to curse her. . . .

She shuddered a little at the black oaths, but nothing could stay her in her purpose. He was breathless when she straightened up, studied intently for a moment a sheaf of papers, and thrust them into her hand-bag with the revolver. Then touching the push-button which released a secret door, she slipped from the room, and within another minute had made her way unseen from the house.

CHAPTER VIII

White Water

IN BROAD daylight Alan Law opened bewildered eyes to realize the substance of a dream come true. He lay upon a couch of balsam, in a corner of somebody's camp—a log structure, rudely furnished. His clothing lay upon a chair at his side.

He arose and dressed, exulting in his sense of renewed well-being, a prey to hints of an extraordinary appetite. There were evidences of a woman's recent presence: blankets neatly folded upon a second bed of aromatic balsam in the corner, a pair of dainty buckskin gauntlets depending from a nail in the wall, and, in an old preserve jar on the table, a single rose, warm and red, dew upon its petals!

There was fire in the cook-stove and things to cook, but despite his hunger Alan didn't stop for that. He rushed to the door, threw it open, and looked out. There was no living thing in sight.

The place was a table of level land some few acres in area, bounded on one hand, beneath the cliff from which he had dropped, by a river fat with recent rains; on the other by a second cliff of equal height.

Near the camp, upon a strip of shelving beach, two canoes were drawn up. Dense thickets of pines, oaks, and balsam hedged in the clearing.

He was, it seemed, to be left to himself that day; when he had cooked and made way with an enormous breakfast, Alan found nothing better to do than to explore this pocket domain. He never wandered far from camp. He was indisposed to run any risk of not being at home to welcome the woman who had nursed him and then vanished, leaving him for souvenir only that rose (culled from a bush that some whim of chance had planted near the cabin door) and the memory of her lips. . . .

He feasted famously again at noon; whiled away several hours by fishing with rod and tackle found in the camp, and toward three o'clock lounged back to his aromatic couch for a nap.

The westering sun had thrown a shadow across the cove when he was awakened. Rose Trine was kneeling beside him, clutching his shoulders, calling him by name. He wasted no time discriminating between dream and reality, but gathered both into his arms. And for a moment she rested there unresisting, if sobbing quietly.

"What is it, dearest?" he questioned, kissing her tears away.

"To find you all right. . . . I was so afraid!"

"Of what? Wasn't I all right when you left me here this morning?"

She looked strangely at him.

"I did not leave you here this morning, Alan. I wasn't here——"

"You were not——" he stammered. "Then who——?"

"Judith," she stated with conviction.

"Impossible! You don't understand."

The girl shook her head. "Yet I know Judith was here until this morning. I tell you I *know!* She passed us in a canoe a few hours ago while we watched in hiding. And one of her guides *told* mine she was here with you. She had sent him to South Portage for quinine. He stopped there to get drunk, and that's how my guide managed to worm the information from him."

"I don't understand." Alan passed a hand across his eyes.

The report of a rifle interrupted him. At this, clutching frantically at his arm, the girl drew him away toward the river.

"Oh, come!" she cried wildly. "There's no time——!"

"But why? What was that?"

"Judith is returning. We must escape the only way—by the river."

"The current is too strong."

"But downstream—the current with us——"

"How about those rapids?"

"We must shoot them!"

"Can it be done?"

"It must be!"

He offered no further objection, but turned at once and launched one of the canoes. Rose took her place in the bow, paddle in hand; and Alan was about to step in astern when a shot sounded and a bullet kicked up turf within a dozen feet. A glance discovered two figures debouching into the clearing. He dropped into place and, planting paddle in shallows, sent the canoe well out with a vigorous thrust. Two strokes took it to the middle of the pool, where the current caught the little craft and sped it through more narrow and higher banks. A moment more, and the mouth of the gorge was yawning for them.

Alan rose carefully to his feet for a reconnaissance. He looked back first, and saw the prow of the second canoe glide out from the banks. He looked ahead. The rapids were a wilderness of shouting waters, white and green. But there was no escaping that ordeal. The canoe was already spinning between walls where the water ran deep and fast. The man settled down to work with grim determination, pitting courage and strength and experience against the ravening, bellowing waters that tore at the canoe on every hand.

He fought like one possessed. There was never an instant's grace between judgment and execution; and both must be instantaneous, or else—destruction. Again and again the canoe plunged wildly toward the instant annihilation which was avoided only by the timely plunge of a paddle, guided by luck or instinct or both. The one ray of hope in Alan's mind sprang from the fact that, however rough, the rapids were short. Now, when he had been in their grasp a minute, he seemed to have been there hours.

His labourings were tremendous, unbelievable, inspired. The goal of safety was within sight when Alan's paddle broke, and the canoe swung broadside to a boulder, turned turtle, and precipitated both headlong into that savage welter.

As the next few moments passed he was fighting like a mad thing against overwhelming odds. Then, of a sudden, he found himself swimming mechanically in the smooth water of a wide pool beyond the lowermost eddy, the canoe floating bottom up nearby, and Rose supporting herself with one hand on it.

Her eye met his, clear with adorable courage. He floundered to her side, panted instructions to transfer her hand to his shoulder, and struck out for the nearer shore. Both found footing at the same time and waded out exhausted.

Then Alan remembered the pursuit. He looked

up the rapids in time to view the last swift quarter of the canoe's descent, Judith in the bow, motionless, a rifle across her knees, in the stern an Indian guide kneeling and fighting the waters with scarcely perceptible effort in contrast with Alan's supreme struggles. Like a living thing the canoe seemed to gather itself together, it hurtled the eddy in a bound, took the still water with a mighty splash, and shot downstream at diminished speed.

Judith lifted her rifle and brought it to bear—upon her sister. With a cry of horror, Alan flung himself before Rose. For a breathless instant the woman in the canoe stared along the sights, then lowered her weapon and spoke to the guide, who instantly began to ply a brisk paddle. The canoe sped on and vanished round the bend.

"Why, in the name of heaven, why?" asked Alan, amazed.

The girl said dully: "Don't you *know?*" And when he shook his head. "Her guide told mine you had saved her life on the dam at Spirit Lake. Now do you see?"

His countenance was blank: "Gratitude?"

"Not gratitude alone, but something more terrible. . . . Not that I can blame her. . . . But come, if we strike through here we shall, I think, pick up a trail that will bring us to Black Beaver settlement by dark."

CHAPTER IX

Forewarned

THE thing was managed with an ingenuity that Alan termed devilish: it was indisputably Machiavellian.

The lovers had come down from the North in hot haste and the shadow of death. Two days of steady travelling, by canoe, by woods trail, by lake steamer, wore to a culmination through this endless afternoon on the train from Moosehead Lake. No sort of privacy or comfort was attainable in cars crowded to suffocation with fretful, sweating people, homeward bound from a week-end holiday over the Fourth.

Nor was it possible to discriminate, to guess whether or not they rode in the company of spies and enemies. Chin in hand, indifferent to discomfort, Alan brooded, his eyes fixed on this woman whom he loved, who had taken her life in her hand to save his life.

She lay back listlessly in the chair beside his, visibly wilting in the heat blast, her hair in disarray, her eyes closed, fair cheeks faintly flushed, pulses

slowly throbbing in that exquisite, immaculate throat. . . .

He would have given worlds to be able to try and comfort her. But with all those abominable people——

No matter, the longest afternoon must have its evening; an hour or so more and they would be in Portland, surrounded by all the conveniences and safeguards of civilization, free at last to draw breath of ease in the land of law, order, and sane living.

The train had paused at the last hill station. Then as the trucks groaned and moved anew, a lout of a boy came galloping down the aisle, brandishing two yellow envelopes and blatting like a brazen calf.

"Mista' Lawr! Mista' Lawr! Tel'grams for Mista' Lawr!"

Alan snatched the envelopes, tipped the boy, and hoped to heaven he might break his sunburned neck as he tumbled off the rear steps.

He had been expecting a reply to his wire for reservations on the night express from Portland to New York. But why two envelopes superscribed "*Mr. A. Law, Kineo train southbound, Oakland Sta?*"

He tore one open, and grunted disgust with its curt advice; opened the other and caught his breath as he withdrew—part way only—a playing card—a Trey of Hearts.

Thrusting it back, he tore both envelopes into a

IT WAS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

ALAN FOUND HIMSELF LOVING THE DAUGHTER OF HIS ENEMY.

hundred fragments and scattered them from the window. But the fiendish wind whisked one small scrap back into the lap of the woman he loved. The silken lashes trembled, lifted slightly, disclosing the dark glimmer of questioning eyes. And as she clipped the scrap of card-board between thumb and forefinger, he silently took from her one corner of the Trey of Hearts.

She nodded acknowledgment of his dumb solicitude but made no direct comment.

"The Pullman agent at Portland wires that there are no reservations available on any New York train in the next thirty-six hours," he said with lowered voice. "We'll have to rest up overnight, I guess."

"Couldn't we catch the New York boat to-night?"

"No. It leaves before we get in."

She said, "Too bad," abstractedly, reclosed her eyes, and apparently lapsed anew into semi-somnolence, but without deceiving him who could well guess what poignant anxiety gnawed at her heart.

He could have ground his teeth in exasperation: the impish insolence of that warning. To think that this was America, this the twentieth century, and still a man could be hunted from pillar to post, haunted with threats, and that by a slip of a girl with the cunning of a madwoman, the heart of a thug, the face the beloved woman that sat beside him.

A surmise slowly settled into conviction that the woman Judith Trine, sister to the Rose he loved so well, was as mad as that monomaniac, her father, who sat helpless in his cell of silence and shadows in New York, impatient for the word that his vengeance had been consummated by the daughter whom he had inspired to execute it. . . .

In the dusk of evening the train lumbered into Portland station; and, heart in mouth, Alan helped Rose through the crowd and into a taxicab.

"Best hotel in town," he demanded. "And be quick—for a double tip."

He did not dare plume himself on a new escape. He dared not even trust this public chauffeur. Yet that one he distrusted, it seemed, without reason: shortly the cab stopped before a hotel of tolerable pretensions on a quiet street.

He had communicated his scheme to the girl en route, receiving her endorsement of it. Now, having registered for her and seen her to the door of the best available room in the house within call of the public lobby and office, he washed, gulped a hasty meal, and hurried away into the night with only the negro driver of a fortuitous hack for his guide.

CHAPTER X

The Captain of the "Seaventure"

HE WASTED the better part of an hour in fruitless inquiries: then his luck led him down a poorly lighted wharf, at the end of which he discovered a young man perched atop a pile, hands in pockets, gaze turned seaward, lips pursed—whistling. At the sound of footsteps this person turned to appraise the stranger, then, reassured, resumed his harmonious diversion of melancholy, and with it his gloomy stare across the water.

"Pardon me," Alan ventured, "perhaps you can help me out——"

"You've come to the wrong shop, my friend," the young man interposed. "I couldn't help anybody out."

"I thought possibly you might know where I could charter a seaworthy boat."

"What kind of a boat?" the young man demanded.

"Anything moderately fast, well-found and able, with accommodations for two passengers—one a lady."

The young man slipped down from his perch.

"If you don't look sharp," he said, "you'll charter the *Seaventure*." He waved his hand toward a vessel moored nearby. "There she is, schooner-rigged, fifty feet over all, twenty-five horsepower auxiliary, two staterooms—all ready. Come aboard."

Alan accepted his invitation, and the light of the cabin lamp revealed to Alan's scrutiny a roughly modelled, good-humoured face enlivened by twinkling though steady blue eyes.

"Name, Barcus," said the young man, "christened Thomas. Nativity, American. State of life, flat broke. I found myself this spring with this boat on my hands, sunk every cent I had fitting out on an oral charter with a moneyed blighter in New York who was to have met me here a fortnight since. He didn't—and here I am, in pawn to the ship-chandler."

"How much do you owe?"

"Upward of a hundred."

"Say I advance that amount, when can we sail?"

"Pay my bills, and we can be off inside an hour. That is—I may have some trouble scaring up a crew."

"How much of a crew do you need?"

"One other who knows his job will be enough."

"Then that's settled," Alan said. "I know boats. I'll be your crew—and the better satisfied to have nobody else aboard."

The eyes of Mr. Barcus clouded. "See here, what's your little game, anyway? I'll be no party to a kidnapping or——"

"It's an elopement," Alan interrupted on inspiration. "We've simply got to get clear of Portland by midnight."

"I'm on!" Barcus agreed. "God knows why I believe you, but I do."

"Now," Alan proceeded, "here's a hundred and fifty. Be ready for us in half an hour—ready to cast off the minute we come aboard."

"I'll be ready," Mr. Barcus agreed, and in a moment the feet of his employer drummed along the deck overhead while Barcus soliloquized: "I don't know your name; you haven't asked my price; if it wasn't for that smile of yours, my hair-trigger friend, I'd be less satisfied that this was my lucky day!"

CHAPTER XI

Blue Water

ANXIETY ate like an acid at Alan's heart. He could only hope against hope and count on haste to make his getaway. But when he reëntered the hotel, one surprising thing happened that gave him new heart: it seemed almost as if his luck had turned. For as he paused at the desk of the cashier to demand his bill, the elevator gate opened and Rose came out to meet him, with an eager air of hope masking her fatigue.

"I worried so I couldn't rest," she told him; "so I watched from the window till I saw you drive up. Then something told me you had been successful——"

He acquainted her briefly with his fortune. "It may be a little hard on you," he concluded, "but she's a comfortable boat enough, and with luck and decent weather——"

"I shall be all right," she protested. "I'm a good sailor, and I am so glad we're to get away. I have been oppressed all evening by a dreadful premonition."

"Nonsense!" he cheered her insincerely. "What could happen in a staid old town like this? We're out of the woods at last!"

But she seemed unable to overcome the heaviness of her spirits even when their cab set them down at the wharf.

Here, Alan had feared, was the crucial point of danger. But his straining senses detected no sign of menace among those black, crowding shadows—and nothing happened. Mr. Barcus was found in cheerful waiting—the *Seaventure* ready to cast off, her motor already grumbling with impatience.

"All right?" he chirruped to his passenger and crew. "Jump aboard! We'll be off in a jiffy."

And he was as good as his word. Alan had barely set foot on deck, following the girl, when a smother of foam boiled up under the stern, the propeller blades gripped water, and the *Seaventure* swung away from the wharf.

After a careful search of the little craft, Alan, satisfied that all was well, nodded cheerfully.

"All right," he said to the girl. "We're clear of that lot, nobody but the three of us aboard. Now you'd best turn in. This is to be your stateroom, this one to port, and you'll have a long night's sleep to make up for what you've gone through, dearest."

He drew nearer, dropping his voice tenderly.

And of a sudden, with a little low cry, the girl came into his arms and clung passionately to him.

"But you?" she murmured. "You need rest as much as I!"

"Oh, no, I don't," he continued. "Barcus and I stand watch and watch, of course. There's nothing for you to do but be completely at your ease. Good-night."

Eyes half-closed, she seemed to suffer his kiss rather than to respond, then turned hastily to her stateroom, leaving him staring in wonder at her strangeness. But he had no time for speculation. A surge of triumph in his heart, he ran up the companion-way and rejoined Barcus.

"Well?" Barcus asked amiably. "Find everything to your satisfaction?"

"I think so—quite. What can I do?"

"Stand by until we round the breakwater. Then take the wheel while I make sail. We'll catch a capful of wind as soon as we get out, and then this old hooker is due to set a pace you'll find surprising."

It was well on toward midnight before he finally relieved Alan and told him to turn in. By that time the *Seaventure* was spinning south-southeast, close reefed to a sou'west wind, the fixed white eye of Portland Headlight fast falling astern to starboard.

CHAPTER XII

The Counterfeiter

AT FOUR o'clock Alan was awakened by boot-heels pounding imperatively overhead, and tumbled on deck again, to stand both dog-watches. At eight o'clock, still aching with fatigue, he was free to return to his berth for another four-hour rest.

This time misguided consideration induced Barcus to let his crew sleep through the first afternoon watch. Six bells were ringing when, in drowsy consciousness that something had gone suddenly and radically wrong, Alan wakened. The steady onward urge of the little vessel had given place to wild rocking and pitching, while the song of the wind in the cordage was lost in the flapping and bellow of slack canvas.

For some reason evidently Barcus had found it necessary to bring the *Seaventure* up into the wind; but Alan could imagine no reason why he should have performed the maneuver in such lubberly fashion.

He was on deck almost before he rubbed the sleepiness from his eyes. His first glance discovered the wheel deserted, the woman with back to him

standing at the taffrail, Barcus—nowhere to be seen. The second confirmed his surmise that the *Seaventure* had come up into the wind, and now was yawing off wildly into the trough of a stiff sea. A third showed him to his amazement a Gloucester fisherman—which they had overhauled with ease that morning and which now should have been well down the horizon astern—not two miles distant, and bearing directly down upon the smaller vessel.

Bewildered, he darted to the girl's side, demanding to know what was the matter. She turned to him a face he hardly recognized—but still he didn't understand. The interference was a thing unthinkable; his brain faltered when taxed to credit it. Only when he saw her tearing at the painter, striving to cast it off and with it the dory it dragged a hundred feet astern, and another glance discovered the head of Mr. Barcus rising over the stern of the tender as he strove to lift himself out of the water, did Alan appreciate what had happened.

It was with the feeling that all the world had gone mad, that he seized the girl and tore her away from the rail before she could unknot the painter.

"Rose!" he cried. "What's the matter with you? Don't you see what you're doing?"

She ceased to struggle and lay unresisting in his arms. "Let him go!" she muttered. "*We* don't want him—and he'll be picked up, right enough."

"But—what are you thinking of, Rose——"

"Can't you say anything but 'Rose! Rose! Rose!' Is there no other name that means anything to you? It is intolerable! I love you no less than she—rather more—because I hate you, too! Can't you understand——?"

Convulsively she freed herself. "Let me go!" she insisted. "Let me go!"

"Judith!" he cried, stupefied. "But—good Lord! how did you get aboard? Where's Rose?"

"Where you'll not find her again," the woman retorted. "Trust me for that!"

"What do you mean?" Then illumination came. "Do you mean it was you whom I brought aboard last night?"

"Who else?"

"You waylaid her in the hotel, substituted yourself for her——!"

"Of course. Why not? When I saw her sleeping there—what else should I think of than to take her place with the man I love? I knew *you'd* never know the difference. I was mad enough to think I could stand being loved by you in her name! It was only to-day, when I'd had time to think, that I realized how impossible that was!"

A cry from over the stern roused Alan to fresh appreciation of the emergency. With scant consideration he hustled the woman below, and closed

her in with the sliding latch, then sprang to the taffrail to lend a helping hand to Mr. Barcus, who was climbing aboard, after he had pulled the dory up under the stern by its painter. He came over the rail in a temper, bellowed a blasphemous command to take the wheel and swing the *Seaventure* off again upon her course, and then pulled himself together.

"I hope you'll pardon the impertinence," he suggested acidly, "but may I inquire if that bloody-minded vixen is your blushing bride to be?"

Alan shook a helpless head. "No—it's all a damnable mistake. She's her sister—I mean, the right girl's sister—and her precise double—fooled me—not quite right in the head, I'm afraid."

"You may well be afraid!" Mr. Barcus snapped. "D'you know what she did? Threw me overboard! Fact! Came on deck sweet as peaches, and all of a sudden whips out a gun, points it at my head, and orders me to luff into the wind. Before I could make sure I wasn't dreaming, she had fired twice—in the air—a signal to that fisherman astern there: at least, it answered with two hoots of its whistle and changed course to run up to us. Look how she's gained already!"

A glance showed the vessel within a mile and apparently bent on running them down.

"But how did she happen to throw you overboard?"

"Happen nothing!" Barcus roared. "She did it a' purpose! I had a notion to get that gun away before she did mischief with it, but when I knocked it out of her hand she flew at me like a wildcat, and before I knew what was up, I was slammed backward over the rail. God's mercy gave me a chance at the dory—and at that this giddy she-devil of yours was trying to cast me adrift!"

"I can't tell you how sorry I am," Alan responded gravely. "It's a hideous mix-up, and I'd no business dragging you into it——"

"Amen to that!"

"There's more to tell—but one thing to be done first."

"And that?" Mr. Barcus inquired.

"To get rid of the lady," Alan announced firmly. "Those must be her people aboard that fisherman; and if we let her stop aboard she's certain to do something to cripple us—if she hasn't already; and if that boat ever overhauls us, I'm as good as done for—murdered. It sounds insane, but it's so."

"It doesn't sound insane to me, my friend," said Mr. Barcus ruefully, "not after the last half hour."

"Then take the wheel."

"What are you going to do?"

"Make the fisherman a present. You don't mind parting with the dory—if I pay for it?"

"Take it for nothing," Barcus grumbled.

He took Alan's place, watching him with a sardonic eye as he drew the tender in under the leeward quarter, made it fast, and reopened the companionway. As the girl came on deck, in a rage that only heightened her loveliness, Alan noted a glimmer of satisfaction in her glance astern as she recognized how well the fisherman had drawn up on them.

"Friends of yours, I infer?" Alan inquired.

Judith nodded: "I don't mind telling you she was ordered out of Gloucester by telegraph five minutes after you struck your bargain with this gentleman."

"It would be unkind of us to keep you longer from your friends," Alan observed. "And it will save trouble if you'll be good enough to step into the dory without a struggle."

Without a word, Judith swung herself overside into the dory. Immediately Alan cast off, and for some minutes there was silence between the two men while the tender dropped swiftly astern.

Then suddenly elevating his nose, Barcus sniffed. "Here," he said sharply, "relieve me for a minute, will you? I want to go forward and have a look at that motor."

In the time that he remained between decks the fisherman luffed, picked up the dory and its occupant, and came round again in chase of the *Seaventure*.

When Barcus reappeared it was with a grave face.

"What's the trouble now?"

"Nothing much, only your playful little friend has been up to another of her light-hearted tricks. . . . The drain-cocks of both fuel tanks have been opened, and there are upward of a hundred and fifty gallons of gasoline sloshing around in the bilge."

He cast a shrewd eye aloft and astern. "Stop where you are," he said, "and let her come up only when I give the word. I'm going to let out those reefs. We can stand more sail—and there's no telling how much longer the reef will keep going. It looks to me as if we were up against it—'specially if your lady friend isn't satisfied. Which, from the way that fisherman sticks to us, doesn't seem likely."

ALAN'S ARRIVAL WAS THE SIGNAL FOR MUCH EXCITEMENT.

"Power tender," said Barcus. "Coming to call, I presume. Sociable lot. What *I* can't make out is why do they tow our dory back. Uneasy conscience, maybe—what?"

Alan grunted his disgust, but said nothing.

"Don't take it so hard, old top," Barcus advised. Then he rose and dived down the companion-way, presently to appear with a megaphone and a shotgun.

"No cutting-out parties in this outfit," he explained, grinning amiably. "None of that old stuff, revised to suit your infatuated female friend. *Once aboard the lugger and the man is mine!*"

Stationing himself at the rail, he bellowed through the megaphone.

"Keep off! Come within gunshot and I'll blow your fool heads off!" Putting aside the megaphone, he sat down again. "Not that I'd dare fire this blunderbuss," he confided, "with this reek of gasoline. *Phew-w!* I've inhaled so much gas in the last few hours, I'm dry clean down to my silly old toes!"

For thirty minutes nothing happened. The fisherman's launch was resting motionless on the water, two figures mysteriously busy in its cockpit, the *Seaventure's* dory trailing behind it.

Gradually these details were blotted out by the closing shadows. Far up the coast two white eyes, peering over the horizon, stared steadfastly through the dark: "Chatham Lights," Barcus said they were.

Abruptly he dropped the glasses and jumped up. "Hear that?" he cried.

Now the humming of the motor was again audible and growing louder every instant; and Alan, infected with the excitement of Barcus, could just make out a dark shadow that moved swiftly and steadily toward the *Seaventure*.

"What the devil!" he demanded, puzzled. Barcus grasped his arm excitedly.

"Quick—kick off your shoes—get set for a mile-long swim! Devil's work, all right!" he panted, divesting himself of shoes and outer garments. "I couldn't make out what they were up to till I saw them lash the wheel, light the fuse, start the motor, and take to the dory. They've made a torpedo-boat out of that tender——"

He sprang upon the rail, steadying himself with a stay. "Ready?" he asked. "Look sharp!"

The two dived as one, and not until three hundred feet or more separated them from the schooner did either dare pause for a backward glance.

Then the impact of the launch against the *Seaventure's* side rang out across the waters, and with a roar the launch blew up, spewing skyward a wide-spread fan of flame. There followed a crackling noise, and bright flames licked out all over the schooner from stem to stern. It seemed minutes that she burned in this wise—it was probably not so

long—before her decks blew up and the flames swept roaring to the sky.

By the time Alan and Barcus had gained shoal water that permitted them footing to wade ashore, waist-deep, the *Seaventure* had burned to the water's edge.

CHAPTER XIV

Marooned

ON NAUSET BEACH, Alan and Barcus sprawled on the sands, some distance back from the water, and listened to the thumping of their overtaxed hearts, and panted. Now and again one would lift his head and stare out over the waters at a little line of reddish flames: all that remained to witness to the fact that, an hour since, these two had been in command of as trim and seaworthy a little schooner as ever ventured the trip from Portland to New York. Farther out again a green eye stared unblinking over the water: the starboard light of the becalmed fishing schooner whose crew had caused the disaster.

"Barcus," said Alan, "what I can't understand is why those damned thugs out there thought we'd be asses enough to stay aboard the *Seaventure* and get burned up."

The other replied: "*Did* they?"

"Looks that way. If they didn't, why were we permitted to swim ashore? There was nothing to prevent their rowing round to cut us off."

"Maybe they did, and missed us, Mr. Law-and-

Order! We were a wee mite excited, you've got to admit. It's possible we didn't hear the noise of their oars. And it's black enough for them to have overlooked us. A man's head in the water isn't really a conspicuous object on a dark night."

"I suppose not," said Alan indifferently. "It doesn't matter. Tell me, Barcus, what's the nearest symptom of civilization?"

"Chatham village," said Mr. Barcus, "six miles or so to the no'th'ards, and cut off by an inlet. Then there's the lighthouse on Monomoy Point, three miles to the south."

A silence followed, broken only when Mr. Law voiced a thought bred of malignant contemplation.

"I'd give a deal to know who's aboard that vessel."

"You don't mean you think your regular young woman——!"

"It's possible," said Law. "Judith kidnapped her in Portland. That's not so far from Gloucester a motor-car couldn't have caught that schooner before she sailed to waylay us this morning. And what better way to take care of a girl you've kidnapped than to ship her somewhere by sea, in the care of trustworthy hellions——?"

"Don't ask me. I've done very little kidnapping."

"For tuppence," said Law, "I'd swim off to that boat and see for myself."

"For two million dollars, I would *not!*" Barcus

affirmed. "I'm as wet as I mean to be for the next twenty-four hours."

A moment later the line of little flames went out, and the owner of the late *Seaventure* fancied he could hear the hiss of smouldering timbers sucked under and drowned out.

"Exit," he announced moodily, "exit *Seaventure*. R. I. P.—a good little ship!"

"Oh, let up, can't you?" Mr. Law exclaimed peevishly. "I'm sorrier than you are—and, after all, it's my loss: I've got to buy you another boat. All you've actually lost is your temper."

"*And* my susceptibility to the charms of the sex," Mr. Barcus corrected. "Nothing can ever restore my lost faith in woman's gentleness. When you brought aboard that young woman I thought butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, and first thing I know she ups and points a gun at my head and tips *me* overboard, and then makes a pretty bonfire out of my sailboat."

For a moment the two maintained attentive silence. Then a little flutter of sound came from across the water. Gradually it gathered volume, and became recognizable as the lisp of cautious oars.

"I'm going away from here," Mr. Barcus announced firmly.

"Half a second," Alan Law pleaded. "I've got a scheme."

"Rot!" Barcus interrupted; "all you've got is what I've got—a bare chance for your life by running like hell for Monomoy Light. If we're sticking round here when that boat lands, this blithe elopement of yours is liable to finish like that Dead March from Saul!"

"Yes—but listen!" Alan insisted. "They've got to land, haven't they, and leave the boat while they look for us? Well, then, what's to prevent our hiding in the dunes and——?"

"It's a head you've got on your shoulders," Barcus struck in admiringly. "Chances are they'll pot us in the act; but I never did dote on walking, and it's *all* of three miles to Monomoy Light!"

In the next breath, "*Look out!*" he shrieked. A blue flare had broken out in full blaze on the surface of the water near them, revealing a dory which had drawn in under cover of the darkness, and at the same time discovering to its occupants the two startled figures on the beach. Before they could stir, a spiteful tongue of flame spat out, and a bullet sang between them and buried itself in the sands behind them.

The two turned and pelted off down the beach, seeking to escape that deadly area of illumination. Other shots sped them, but none was so well aimed as the first; and presently they gained the grateful shelter of the night-wrapped dunes.

"Easy!" Barcus counselled, pulling up. "Not too far into this wilderness, or we'll be lost."

Meantime the dory had grounded on the beach, and its occupants, jumping out, set off in pursuit of the fugitives, following their tracks with the aid of electric flash-lamps. The darkness, however, conspired with the labyrinth of the dunes to save Alan and his companion. It was a matter of comparative ease to confuse the chase.

Within five minutes—while the chase floundered at random a quarter mile to the south—Law and Barcus were squirming snakelike up the back of a ten-foot bluff. From its brow they looked down on the spot where the dory lay—under armed guard—an unhappy fact made evident by the play of a flash-lamp intermittently raking the beach on every hand.

In an interval of blackness, slowly and stealthily Alan got to his feet and swung back a heavy club of driftwood which he had chanced upon. A pause ensued, of waiting for the flash-light to make sure of his aim. Instead of that, a match spluttered, revealing with its reddish glow a bronzed and evil visage intent upon the bowl of a pipe.

The guard puffed fast and had the tobacco well aglow when the sky took advantage of his trustfulness and fell upon him like an avalanche. Simultaneously, Alan and Barcus slid down the face of

the bluff and finished what the treacherous sky had left undone. By the time the disarmed guard had recovered sufficiently to cry for help, the dory was a hundred yards off the beach and making excellent time in the direction of the green light.

They wrought at the oars with a machine-like precision that drove the boat fast and furiously. Concealment of their purpose from those aboard the schooner was out of the question. The racket and the play of flash-lamps along the beach must have betrayed the fact that they had turned the tables long before the dory left the inshore shoals.

Caution, however, made them rest on their oars while yet a little way from their goal. No sound was audible other than the whine of an ungreased block; nothing was visible beyond the glare of the green lantern.

"What think?" Barcus whispered.

"No telling," Alan replied. "All a chance."

"You've got that gun handy?"—with reference to the rifle of which they had despoiled the victim of the sky's ill-faith.

"Here."

"Then—let's go to it! Give way!"

A dozen strokes brought them alongside, and the two young men dropped oars, rose, and seizing the low gunwale, lifted themselves to the deck. Nothing opposed them: the deck was silent and deserted.

Alan led the way aft and down the companion-way to the cabin where a dim light burned. Of the two stateroom doors, one disclosed an empty cabin, the other was locked. Trying the handle, Alan fancied he heard a sound within. Pausing, he called, with a thrill of fearful hope:

"Hello in there!"

The response was a cry of incredulous delight: "Alan!"

By way of answer he hurled all his hundred and eighty pounds against the door. The lock splintered away from its socket, the door flew open with a bang, and Alan strode into the room with a cry: "*Rose!*"

His sweetheart met him halfway, her arms uplifted, her countenance transfigured.

The discreet Mr. Barcus turned and ascended the companion-way, his nose wrinkled with misgivings.

"Blest if I know how he can tell 'em apart," he remarked. "Not that I blame him for taking a chance: it wouldn't pain *me* any to find out I'd kissed the wrong girl—not, that is, unless she didn't care for my technique. In that case, I guess the sequel would be apt to prove tolerable agonizing!"

CHAPTER XV

Dead Reckoning

SOME ten minutes later a hail from the deck disturbed the lovers.

"Below there! I say—Law!—wind a-coming!"

"Right O! Half a minute!"

But that stipulated delay was several times multiplied before Alan showed up on deck, to find Barcus bending a laborious back to the capstan. Already a breath of coolness stole through the warm languor of the night: blocks creaked, canvas shivered: there was a sibilant murmur in the water outside.

"Lend a hand, can't you?" Barcus complained. "I didn't interrupt you just to get an audience. The sooner we get this anchor in——"

"But I don't want the anchor," Alan protested. "It isn't my anchor. I say, cut the cable—or let it run."

Barcus stepped back from the capstan and kicked open the pawl, with the result that the windlass began merrily to unwind.

"My compliments! I never thought of that.

If you'd only betray as much intelligence in managing your private affairs——"

Alan checked him. "What's that?" he demanded in a tone tense with apprehension. The rumbling of a marine motor drifted down on the wings of the sluggish winds.

"Don't ask me. I'm afraid to guess!"

"But they couldn't possibly——"

"Since when did you set up to be a judge of possibilities? Nothing probable ever happened to you 's far's I can make out. I *know* there are two lifesaving stations on Nauset, both with modern equipment—motor lifeboats and all. Our business is to get out of here quick, and not advertise our exit, either. Take that port light in and dowse it, while I do the same by the starboard. Then duck below and put out the cabin lamp. Then, if this blackness holds, we may manage an invasion!"

There followed an exceedingly busy quarter of an hour. They were clever sailormen, used to all sorts of craft, and the end of that period found the schooner with sheets taut and canvas full to a good easterly breeze—the light on Monomoy Point watching them from over the starboard beam.

"Hear anything more of that power boat?" Alan asked, joining Barcus by the wheel.

"Nothing—wind too fresh."

"Better let me stand the first trick—what?"

"Nix! I know my way about these shoals blindfold, whereas you couldn't weather Monomoy safely in broad daylight. Get under the table and be a good dog—d'you hear?"

With a chuckle, Alan obediently stretched himself out on the deck.

"I say, Law! You seem pretty easy in your mind about this young woman below. Sure you ain't been stung twice?"

"Sure," Alan asserted with conviction.

"Well, I reckon *you* ought to know. But to me, she's the same that tried to send me to Davy Jones' locker. How did she get aboard here?"

"I fancy they chloroformed here while she slept in that hotel in Portland. Whether or no, Rose woke up in a closed motor-car—bound and gagged, of course—and was brought aboard at Gloucester about midnight."

"Simple when you know how," Barcus commented. "Cuddle down, now, and I'll sing you to sleep. . . ." Unconsciousness like a cloud soon descended upon Alan's overwearied faculties. . . .

He awoke with a yawn and a shiver, in the gray of chill daybreak. A thick fog pressed heavily upon the face of the waters, and moisture beaded all things, even Alan's face and hands. Barcus stood at the wheel, reeling with weariness, his eyes half-closed in a face like a mask of fatigue.

CHAPTER XVI

Debacle

THE loneliness of Alan's vigil was eventually relieved by the appearance on deck of the woman he loved.

The tableau that greeted her—of one haggard wretch at the wheel and the other lying at his feet in the stupor of fatigue—instantly wrung from Rose a little cry of solicitude.

Warm food and hot coffee lent a little tone to Alan's spirits, and he was presently able to discuss their situation.

"There's only one way out of it I can see—flight. If we win safely in New York, the only thing is for us to marry with all haste and leave the country by the first boat."

By way of answer she nestled still more closely into the hollow of his arm, and he continued: "Otherwise, I can't see anything for it but to fight the enemy with their own weapons. What I'm most afraid of is that sometime I may forget it's a woman I'm defending myself against. When a fellow's fighting for his life he can't always stop to calculate the weight of his blows."

ALAN AND ROSE PREPARE AN ESCAPE INTO THE FOREST.

JUDITH FINDS THE TRAIL OF THE FUGITIVES.

EVERY NERVE QUIVERED AT THOUGHT OF REVENGE.

There was a little pause; then: "Death," the girl said slowly, "I'm not sure it wouldn't be merciful to Judith."

"But not by my hand!"

"Oh, no! Not that, not that! But she isn't responsible—not quite sane, I think. And even if you are spared, my dear one, there are lives of others to consider, presuming she stays at large."

"I've thought of that," he said gravely. "If only she could be put away some place and watched —restrained——"

"You've my consent," Rose responded. "But even so, my father and his agents remain to be dealt with!"

The young man held her closer to him: "Don't fear, I'll find some way out without injuring either of them. I promise you that!"

He sealed the pledge upon her lips. . . .

And in that moment from some point forward a crash sounded simultaneously with the dull shock of collision with a smaller vessel; and a strange voice cried out in exultation. The decks rang loud with a crush of booted feet pounding aft. Alan sprang toward the companion-way to fetch the rifle. But his feet slipped. He went down, and an instant later two men fell heavily upon him—active, strong fellows in the dress of fishermen. He was suffered to rise only as a prisoner, helpless in the grasp of two

pairs of powerful hands. Barcus was rudely jerked to his feet and held captive by two more fishermen. A fifth had taken charge of Rose, clamping her wrists in the vise of one big hand. The sixth and sole other member of the boarding party was—Judith Trine.

Down the side a heavy lifeboat ground its way astern, the loose end of its painter slipping over the rail even as Alan caught sight of it. Observing this, one of the men in charge of Alan addressed Judith for leave to retrieve the boat.

"No—let it go. Hold that man fast till I fetch a rope. We'll make sure of them both this time!"

Straining forward, Rose implored her sister: "Judith, in pity's name, think what you are doing!"

"Hold your tongue!" Judith snapped. "Another whimper, and I'll have you gagged. "Yes, I'll——"

The balance of her threat was drowned out by the sudden roar of a steamship fog-signal so close aboard that it seemed almost to emanate from the forepart of the schooner herself.

It was answered by cries of terror from a dozen throats and Alan found himself released as his captors sprang toward the taffrail. He caught a glimpse of the towering bows of a great steamer—sweeping swiftly toward them. Some one aboard the schooner bellowed a terrified appeal:

"Stop your engines! Shut off your propeller! Stop your——"

Then, like the wrath of God, the steamship overwhelmed them, its bows sliced through the schooner as a knife through cheese. . . .

When Alan came up he struck out at random. Aware of several dark objects dotting the surface not far away, he swam for the nearest: the head was a woman's, the face turned toward him the face of Rose.

He gasped wildly: "*Keep cool! Don't struggle! Put one hand on my shoulder and——*"

What happened then was never quite clear: he knew only that he was forced to fight for his life—that the woman flung herself upon him like some maddened animal, clutching his throat, winding her limbs around his, dragging him down and down. . . .

Primitive instinct alone saved him. He remembered freeing an arm, drawing it back, delivering a blow with all his strength, and that he was then free and struggling back to the air.

Then a boat-hook caught and dragged him some distance, until two strong hands caught him beneath the armpits and held his head above water. He looked up witlessly into the face of Barcus, and still bewildered, struggled feebly. But the other's voice brought him back to his senses: "Easy, old top! Take it easy! You're all right now—rest a minute, then help me get you aboard."

He obeyed, and presently, with considerable as-

sistance from Barcus, contrived to scramble in over the gunwales of a boat which proved to be the stolen lifeboat. Aside from Barcus and himself it held one other person only—the woman he loved, crumpled up and unconscious, in the bow. He strove to rise and go to her, but Barcus restrained and quieted him.

"There! Easy, I say! She's all right—fainted—that's all! She and I took the water in practically the same spot, and luck threw this blessed boat my way. No trouble at all."

"But the others—Judith! I left her out there—unconscious—she'll drown, I tell you!"

"And I'll tell you something!" said Mr. Barcus severely. "You'll lie quiet and shut up or I'll dent your dome with an oar. Let her drown—and a good job, I say! Don't you know the meaning of 'enough?' Merciful heavens, man, you're the most insatiable glutton for punishment ever!"

But Alan wasn't listening. There was a horror in his heart.

Dead! Judith dead! Back there, in the fog and the cold . . . dead by his hand!

CHAPTER XVII

The Masked Voice

THE leaden fog wrapped the world in an embrace as inexorable as the coils of some great, gray, slimy serpent. Through its sluggish folds the lifeboat crept at snail's pace. In the bow, Rose rested in exhaustion, her eyes closed, her head pillowed on a life preserver, her sodden garments modelled closely to the slender body that ever and again was shaken by a long, shuddering respiration.

Seated on the nearest thwart, Alan watched over her with a grimly hopeless solicitude. Premonition of misfortune darkened his heart with an impenetrable shadow. In the stern, Tom Barcus presided morosely over the steering gear.

Thus for hours on end it had been with these three: ever the boat ploughed steadily onward. Destitute of compass and of all notion of the sun's bearings, Barcus steered mainly through force of habit—the salt-water man's instinctive feeling that no boat under way should ever in any conceivable circumstance lack a hand at the helm.

For some time subsequent to the collision fog-

signals sounding now near, now far, in the encompassing obscurity had fostered hope; but now for more than an hour the silence had been uncannily constant, broken only by the rumble of the motor, the lisp of water slipping down the slide, the suck and gurgle of the wake.

Forebodings no less portentous than Law's crawled in the mind of Barcus. It was as likely as not that the lifeboat was travelling straight out to sea. And gasoline tanks can and oftentimes do become—empty. Moreover, Barcus was a confirmed skeptic in regard to the reliability of marine motors. In view of all which considerations he presently opened the battery switch. The cessation of that uniform drone was startling enough to rouse Rose Trine from her state of semi-somnolence. With a look of panic she sat up, thrust damp hair back from her eyes, and nervously inquired:

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Barcus replied: "I shut the engine off—that's all." Then, uninterrupted, the stillness strangled their spirits in its ruthless grasp, until of a sudden a cry shrilled through the fog, so near at hand that it seemed scarcely more distant than over the side:

"*Ahoy! Help! Ahoy there! Help!*"

So urgent was its accent that it brought the three as one to their feet, all a-tremble, eyes seeking one another's faces, then shifting uneasily away.

"What can it be?" Rose whispered, aghast, shrinking into Alan's ready arm.

"Some other unfortunate," Alan replied, obviously with an effort. For his flesh crawled with superstitious dread. He knew that voice; it was the voice of one whom he had believed dead, drowned fathoms deep, miles from that spot.

"Judith!" the girl moaned.

"Impossible!" Alan contended. "I saw her go down. . . ."

"That doesn't prove she didn't come up," Barcus broke in acidly.

"*Ahoy! Motorboat aho-o-oy! Help!*"

Alan cupped hands to mouth and sent an answer ringing through the murk.

"*Ahoy! Where are you? Where away?*"

"*Here—on the reef—half drowned—perishing with cold——*"

"How does my voice bear?" Alan called back.

"What the dickens do you care?" Barcus interpolated suspiciously.

"*To port,*" came the response. "*Starboard your helm and come in slowly!*"

"*Right O! Half a minute!*" Alan replied assuringly.

"Like hell!" Barcus muttered in his throat as he bent over the flywheel.

Jumping on the forward thwart and balancing

himself perilously near the gunwale, Alan peered into the fog.

"Can't make out anything," he grumbled. "Start her up—but 'ware reef!"

"Nothing doing," Barcus retorted curtly. "The motto is now, '*Full speed astern!*'"

"Oh, come! We can't leave a woman—in a fix like that!"

"Can't we? You watch!" Barcus grunted, rocking the flywheel with all his might; for the motor had turned suddenly stubborn.

"Alan!" Rose pleaded, "think what it means. I know it sounds heartless of me—my own sister—but you know how mad she is—wild with hatred and jealousy. If you take Judith into this boat, it's your life or hers!"

"If we leave her out there," Alan retorted, "it's her life on our heads!"

At this juncture the motor took charge of the argument and settled it in summary fashion. With a smart explosion it started up unexpectedly in reverse, at one and the same time precipitating Alan overboard and almost dislocating the arm of Mr. Barcus. Alan struggled to the surface just in time to see the bows of the lifeboat back away and vanish into the mist.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Island

NOT more than thirty seconds could have elapsed before Barcus recovered from the shock of the motor's treachery sufficiently to reverse the wheel, throttle down the carburetor, and jump out of the engine-pit. But in that small space of time the lifeboat and Alan Law had parted company as definitely as though one of them had been levitated bodily to the far side of the globe. It could not have been more than a minute after the accident before Barcus was guiding the boat over what he could have sworn was the precise spot where Alan had disappeared, but without discovering a sign of him. For the next twenty minutes he divided attention between vain attempts to soothe the distracted girl and to educe a reply from Alan by stentorian hailing. Then of a sudden he verged so close upon the object of his search that he was warned off in a manner sufficiently arresting by nothing more or less, in fact, than a gunshot. On the echo of this a man's rough voice warned peremptorily:

"Sheer off, damn you! Sheer off! If you come

on another yard I'll blow your heads off your shoulders!"

Precipitately Barcus reversed and then silenced the engine.

"Alan!" he yelled. "Alan! Give a hail to tell us you're safe!"

The answer came in another voice—Judith's, clear, musical, effervescent with sardonic humour.

"Be at peace, little one—bleat no more! *Mr.* Law is with us—and safe——!"

Barcus sought counsel of Rose. Her eyes were blank with despair. He shook his head helplessly. With no way on her, the lifeboat drifted.

After a little the girl crept aft, and they conferred in guarded tones.

"What can we do?" Rose implored. "We can't leave him. . . . Oh, when I think of him there, in *her* power, I could go mad!"

"If only I knew," Barcus protested, "but my hands are tied. There's nothing to go by—except the bare chance that the reef she mentioned may be Norton's. It doesn't seem possible, but we *may* have made that much southing. If so, we're about three miles off the mainland, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Katama Island, a little desolate rocky bump inhabited mainly by fishermen."

The girl racked her hands. "But how could

Judith have got there—with her men—and dry ammunition?"

"Don't ask me. Going on my experience with the lady, I'd be willing to bet she was picked up by the steamer that ran us down, and proceeded to make a prize of it—or tried to. Perhaps she found or stole a boat from somebody; she couldn't have made Norton's Reef by swimming—it's too far. That's the answer, they were picked up, stole a boat, and piled it up on the reef."

"And there's no hope——!"

"If we could make the mainland and get help. . . ."

His accents died away into a disconsolate silence that held unbroken for more than an hour. Rose went back to her place in the bow, crouched there, a huddled shape of wretchedness; and in the stern sat Barcus submerged in a dejection no less profoundly dismal, his gaze directed vacantly at his feet.

Alan was delivered into the hands of the enemy: defeated in the game he had played with such brave spirit—his life for the forfeit.

Brief though their friendship was in actual duration of time, Barcus had come to hold the man in such affection as only is possible between men who have faced danger and endured hardship shoulder to shoulder.

Tom Barcus mourned a brave man and loyal friend. . . .

So slowly did the current bring the lifeboat toward the beach and so still was the tide that neither appreciated they were near land until the bows grounded with a slight jar and a grating sound.

With a cry of "Land, by all that's lucky!" Barcus jumped up, then stooping, lent the girl a hand, and helped her to her feet. Then sandy beach was revealed to their wondering eyes, backed by a looming wall of rock whose top was lost in vapour.

Hardly had Rose found time to comprehend this good fortune, when Barcus was over the side and dragging the boat up on the shoals. Then lifting Rose down, he set her on dry land, rummaged out anchor and cable and planted the former well up under the foot of the cliff.

As he rose from this last labour, the westering sun broke through the fog. In less than five minutes thereafter the wind had rolled the fog back and sent it spinning far out to sea, while the shore was deluged with sunlight bright and deliciously warm.

"You're about all in?"

She nodded confirmation of what was no more than simple truth.

"Where are we?" she added.

He could only make her party to his own perplexity.

"You're not fit to travel," he pursued. "Do you mind being left alone while I take a turn up the beach and have a look around? We can't be far from some sort of civilization; even if this is an island, there are few desert islands along this coast. I'll find something soon enough, no fear. . . . There's a niche among the rocks up there," Barcus indicated, "almost a cave, where you'll be warm and dry enough, and secure from overhead observation. Maybe you can even manage a wink of sleep." . . .

She negatived that suggestion with a dreary smile: no sleep for her until sheer exhaustion overpowered her or she knew Alan's fate!

And so iterating his promise to be no longer than might be absolutely needful, he left her.

CHAPTER XIX

The Sunset Tide

FOR a time after Barcus had tramped off she lingered upon the sands, in the mouth of the shelter he had selected, staring hungrily out over the shimmering sea. Slowly the sea darkened with the slow decline of the sun, by whose altitude above the horizon the day had now not ninety minutes more to run. She thought drowsily that if that sun sank without her learning that her lover lived, it would not rise again upon a world tenanted by Rose Trine.

It was not true, she told herself, that people never die of broken hearts. . . . Then sleep overwhelmed her suddenly, like a great, dark cloud. But its dominion over her was not of long duration. She came to her senses to find Barcus gently shaking her by the shoulder, and sat up with a cry of mystified compassion; for in the brief time that he had been absent—it had not been more than an hour—most unquestionably Mr. Barcus had been severely used.

He had acquired a long but shallow cut over one eye, together with a bruised and swollen cheek; and what simple articles of clothing remained to him,

after his strenuous experiences of the last forty-eight hours, had been reduced to even more primitive simplicity: his shirt, for example, now lacked one entire sleeve.

"No," he told her, "don't waste time pitying me. I'm all right—*and so is Alan!* That's the main thing for you to understand; he's still alive and sound——"

"Where is he? Take me to him!" she demanded.

"That's the rub," Barcus confessed, knuckling his hair. "I dassent take you to him. Judith might not like it. Besides, it isn't safe to mingle with the inhabitants of this tight little island, and you can't get to Alan without mingling considerably. Sit down; I'll tell you all about it, and we'll try to figure some way out. Maybe we can frame up a rescue under cover of night."

And when the girl settled herself beside him, he launched into a detailed report.

"It's Katam Island," he announced, "but the place has changed since I visited it some years ago. Then it was a decent community; now, unless all signs fail, it's a den of smugglers. I noticed a number of Chinese about; and when I ventured to introduce myself to the village gin-mill and ask a few innocent questions, the entire population landed on me like a thousand of brick. I suspect we've stumbled on a settlement of earnest workers at the gentle

art of helping poor Chinamen evade the exclusion laws."

With a wry smile, he continued: "I came to just in time to witness the landing of your amiable sister, her gang, and Alan, in company with as choice a crew of scoundrels as you'd care to see. I gathered from a few words that leaked out of the back door of the barroom that Judith had stolen a boat from the ship that picked her up, and then piled it up on Norton's Reef; and shortly after she had gathered Alan in, the schooner of these smugglers happened along, and she hailed it and struck a bargain with them. Anyway, her lot and the islanders were soon as thick as thieves, and tanking up so sociably that I got a chance to whisper a word to Alan and tell him you were all right, and that he'd find us both down here on the beach, if he escaped. He's locked up now in a little stone hut on the edge of the cliff, with the door guarded and the window overlooking a sheer drop of thirty feet or so to the beach. When I'd seen that much, I calculated it was about time for me to go before Mam'selle Judith nicked me with the evil eye."

"You don't think she saw you?" the girl cried.

"I don't think so," Barcus allowed gravely; and then, lifting his gaze, he added as he rose in a bound, "I just *know* she did—that's all!"

In another instant he was battling with three

ruffians who had come suddenly round a shoulder of rock. Weak with suffering and fatigue, he was overborne in a twinkling, and his hands were made fast behind his back. Rose's resistance was as futile as his own; she, too, was captive, and her hands were bound like his.

Suddenly the sound of a strange laugh chilled the blood in Barcus, and he swung sharply to confront Judith Trine.

He was by no means poor-spirited, but he shrank from the look she gave him, and was relieved when with a sneer she passed him by and planted herself before her sister.

"Well?" she demanded brusquely. "How many more lessons will you need to make you realize I mean to have my way, and that you'll cross me only to suffer for it?"

Rose's courage won the admiration of Barcus. Far from cringing, she seemed to find fresh heart in her sister's challenge.

"So you've tried again?" she inquired. "You've offered him your love yet another time, have you?"

"Silence!" Judith cried in fury.

"Only to learn once more that he would rather death than you?" Rose persisted, unflinching. "And so you come to take your spite out on me, do you? You pitiful thing!"

Judith controlled herself and her voice marvellously.

"You will see," she said evenly. "I have prepared a way to make you understand what opposition to me means. . . ." She waved a hand toward the nearest point of rocks. "Take them along!" she commanded.

Her men without hesitation or further instructions marched Rose and Barcus down to the end of the spit and on into the water.

It was nearly knee-deep before Barcus was halted, forced to sit down, and swiftly made fast in that position, submerged to his chest. This accomplished, the men turned attention to Rose, lashing her in similar wise at Barcus's side.

Then quietly those well-trained servants turned their backs and marched off.

Judith, watching them, laughed her short, mirthless laugh.

"The tide will be high," she said, "precisely at sunset. You may time your lives by that. When the sun dips into the sea, then will your lives go down with it."

She turned on her heel and strode swiftly away.

For some time Barcus struggled vainly. As for Rose, she wasted no strength in struggling.

He noted that already the waters had risen more than an inch.

Humbled even in his terror by that radiant calm

that dwelt upon his companion, he ventured diffidently: "Rose—Miss Trine—I'm sorry," he said, which was not at all what he had meant to say. "I've done my best. I suppose it's wrong to give up, but they've made it too much for me this time."

"I know," she said gently.

The sun was close upon the rim of the world. He closed his eyes to shut out the vision of its slow, implacable descent.

The water was now almost level with his lips.

"It's a good-bye now," he faltered.

"Not yet!" her voice rang beside him, vibrant. "Look—up there—along the cliff!"

Two men were running along the cliff, and the man in the lead was Alan.

Then, even as Barcus gazed, the skyline of the cliff was empty; one or the other had tripped and fallen over the brink, and falling had grasped his enemy and carried him down as well.

By no chance, Barcus told himself, could either escape uninjured.

Yet, to his amazement, he saw one break from the other's embrace and rise. He who lay still was Judith's man.

With a violent effort Barcus lifted his mouth above water and shrieked:

"*Alan! Alan! Help! Here—at the end of the point —in the water—help!*"

A precious minute was lost before Alan discovered their two heads. Then he ran toward them as he had never run before, and as he came whipped out a jackknife and freed its blade.

Even so—since it was, of course, Rose who was first freed—Barcus was half-drowned before Alan helped him in turn up to the beach.

And as this happened the last blood-red rim of the sun was washed under by the waves.

Two minutes later the lifeboat was afloat, and Mr. Barcus, already recovered, was labouring with the flywheel of the motor, stimulated by the sight of a party, led by Judith, racing down the beach.

But it was not until well out from shore that any one of them found time for speech. Then Mr. Barcus straightened up from his assiduous attentions to the motor, and inquired:

"Would you mind, Mr. Law, telling how you got out of that hut?"

"Jumped," Alan responded tersely, "from the window. There was no other way."

"You bear a charmed life," was the only comment. "If ever I get out of this affair I'm going to have a try at your life, myself, just once, for luck!"

CHAPTER XX

The Rocket

AFTER several hours of good behaviour the demon charged with dominion over power-boats rammed the nose of the lifeboat deep into the flank of a skulking shoal of viscid mud quite fifty feet from shore.

While the motor and the men were labouring, panting, struggling, and splashing in a vain effort to work the boat off the shoal, the gasoline gave out. With a gasp, a grunt, and a sigh, the motor fell dumb. The two men, likewise breathless, looked at one another stupidly, but found no words. . . .

"Why not wade ashore?" Rose suggested mildly from the place she had taken astern in order to lighten the bow. "It isn't so far—and what's one more wetting?"

"But there's no sense in Miss Trine wading," Barcus suggested; "we're web-footed as it is; and she's too tired."

"Well, what then?"

"We can carry her, can't we?"

After a toilsome progress Rose at length slipped

from the seat formed by the clasped hands of the two men. "Gee!" grunted Barcus frankly, "and it was me who suggested this!"

The girl responded with a quiet laugh, as natural of effect as one could wish until it ended in a sigh, and, without the least warning, she crumpled upon herself and would have fallen heavily, in a dead faint, but for Alan's quickness.

"Good Lord!" Barcus exclaimed, as Alan gently lowered the inert body of the girl to the sands. "And to think I didn't understand she was so nearly all in—chaffing her like that! I'd like to kick myself!"

"Don't be impatient," Alan advised grimly. "And you might fetch me some water."

It was an order by no means easy to fill; Barcus had only his cupped hands, and little water remained in these by the time he had dashed from the shallows back to the spot where Rose lay, while the few drops he did manage to sprinkle upon her face seemed to avail nothing. In the end Alan gave up the attempt. "She's all right," he reported, releasing a wrist whose pulse he had been timing. "She fainted, right enough, to begin with, but now she's just asleep—and needs it, God knows! It would be kinder to let her rest, at least until I see what sort of a reception that lighthouse over yonder is inclined to offer us."

"You'll go, then?" Barcus inquired. "I'd just as lief, myself——"

"No; let me," Alan insisted. "It's not far—not more than a quarter of a mile.

Barcus nodded, his face drawn and gray in the moon-glare. "Thank God!" he breathed brokenly, "you're able—afraid I'm not."

He sat down suddenly and rested his head on his knees. "Don't be longer than you can help," he muttered thickly.

The truth, however, was that Alan himself was hardly more fit for the tramp. Fatigue seemed to have fastened weights to heels that dragged with ever-heavier reluctance as he plodded along the beach.

But all at once he heard a series of staccato snorts, the mellow tolling of a brazen bell, the rumble of a train!

And then he ran, weariness altogether forgotten in the surge of hope attending this discovery that he was again in touch with civilization.

As he came round the headland he saw before him the quiet vista of a village street with a railroad station.

He burst into the station just as the agent was closing up for the night.

"Nah," the latter averred; "they ain't no more trains till mornin'. Can't y' see I'm shuttin' up?"

"But surely there must be a telegraph station——"

"You bet your life they is—right here. An' I'm shuttin' it up, too. Call around at eight o'clock tomorrer mornin'."

"But I must send a telegram now," Alan protested. "It's a matter of life and death."

"Sure, young feller. It always is—after business hours."

Alan thrust a hand into his trousers pocket. "Will a dollar influence your better judgment?" he suggested.

"Let's see your dollar," the other returned, open incredulity informing his countenance.

Alan brought forth an empty hand.

"Make a light," he said sharply. "My money's in a belt round my waist. Open up your office. You'll get your dollar, no fear!"

Peremptorily he shouldered past the agent and entered the station; he quickly made good his word, unbuckling an oilskin belt beneath his shirt and extracting a fold of banknotes that struck sparks of respect from the agent's flinty arrogance.

"All right," he grumbled. "Write your message. It ain't often I do this, but I'll make an exception for you."

Alan delayed long enough only to make a few inquiries, drawing out the information that the quickest way to any city of importance was by boat across Buzzard's Bay to New Bedford. Boats, it was im-

plied, were plentiful, readily to be chartered. A time-table supplied all other needful advice, and Alan wrote his message swiftly.

Addressed to Digby in New York, it required that gentleman to arrange for a motor-car to wait on the waterfront of New Bedford from 3:00 A. M. till called for in the name of Mr. Law, as well as for a special train at Providence, similarly instructed.

With hope like new life animating him, Alan hurried forth from the station, heedless of the interest in him betrayed by two village loafers, trotted up the street, ordered supper for three at the village hotel, and set off again down the beach.

But now, all unconscious of the fact, he went no more alone.

He found his sweetheart and his friend much as he had left them—with this difference, that Barcus now lay flat on his back and was snoring lustily. He was roused only with the greatest difficulty, and awoke grumbling.

He was placated quickly enough, however, by Alan's information.

But when it was the turn of Rose, both faltered. None the less, it must be done; Alan hardened his heart with the reminder of their urgent necessity, and eventually brought her to with the aid of a few drops of some brandy which he had purchased at the village.

Between them, they helped her up the beach, past the point, and at length to the door of the hotel, where—reanimated by the mere promise of food—Rose disengaged their arms and entered without more assistance, while Barcus in his own famished eagerness was deterred from treading her heels by the hand of Alan falling heavily upon his arm.

"Wait!" the latter admonished in a half-whisper. "Look there!"

Barcus followed the direction of his gesture, and was transfixed by sight of a rocket appearing into the night-draped sky from a point invisible beyond the headland. The two consulted one another with startled and fearful eyes.

As with one voice they murmured one word:

"Judith!"

To this Alan added gravely:

"Or some spy of hers!" Then rousing, Alan released his friend, with a smart shove urging him across the threshold of the hotel.

"Go on," he insisted, "Join Rose and get your supper. I'll be with you as soon as I can arrange for a boat. Tell her nothing more than that—that I thought it unwise to wait longer before looking round."

He turned to find his landlord approaching. His question was barely uttered before the man lifted a willing voice and hailed a fellow townsman idling nearby.

"Hey, Jake—come here!"

Introduced as Mr. Breed, Jake pleaded guilty to ownership of the fastest and staunchest power-cruiser in the adjacent waters. His terms, though extortionate, were undisputed. And Alan readily consented to Mr. Breed's condition—that his crew (of one man) accompany the vessel to bring her back from New Bedford. Then, enjoining haste, and promising to be at the town-wharf within ten minutes, he hastened to join Rose and Barcus and complete the ruin that they had wrought on a plentiful hot supper.

Neither man mentioned the rocket or his fears. Pending developments, there was no profit in exciting Rose's anxieties: haste was the one prescription of that hour.

This they observed religiously: within the stipulated ten minutes they were waiting upon a float at the side of the town-wharf, while the promised row-boat of Mr. Breed leisurely drew in to meet them.

Having embarked, the burden of Alan's solicitude grew lighter with every dip and splash of blades that, wielded by a crew of villainous countenance, brought them nearer a handsome motor boat which Mr. Breed designated as his own. It was not until Alan looked up to find Mr. Breed covering him with a revolver that he had the least apprehension of any danger near at hand.

"I'll take that money-belt of yours, young feller," Mr. Breed announced. "And you be quick about it—not forgetting what's in your trousers pocket!"

In the passion of his indignation, Alan neglected to play the game by the rules. The indifference he displayed toward the weapon was positively unprofessional, for he struck it aside as though it were nothing more dangerous than a straw. And in the same flutter of an eyelash, he launched himself like a wildcat at the throat of Mr. Breed, who went suddenly over the stern, his firearm sinking to the bottom while he splashed and gurgled and blasphemed and saw his crew (who had been the first to suggest this affair while the two watched Alan through the window of the railway station) make sad business of an attempt to overpower Mr. Barcus.

The splash made by the first on entering the water, indeed, anticipated the second splash by less than a minute. And then Mr. Barcus was bending his back to the oars while Alan knelt in the stern and brandished a boat-hook, asserting his intention of braining the first who dared swim alongside.

"And just for this," he added before getting out of earshot, "I'm going to treat my party to a joy-ride in your pretty power-boat. You'll not get a cent; but if you send a man to Newport to-morrow he can have the boat back."

He made the peroration as Barcus brought them

up under the quarter of the power-cruiser. Within two minutes the motor was spinning contentedly, the mooring had been slipped, the motor-boat was heading out into the sound. Rose, made comfortable on a transom of the tiny cabin, went almost instantly asleep, while Alan made all snug, and joined his friend by the wheel.

For the best part of an hour neither spoke. Alan drowsed, soothed by the slap of waves against the side and the dull sing-song of the engine. When he roused himself, for no particular reason, it was to regard with admiration the spectacle of Barcus, tirelessly vigilant and efficient, at the wheel.

"My friend," he observed, languidly, "as our acquaintance ripens I am more and more impressed with the belief that neither of us was born to die a natural death, whether abed or at the hands of those who dislike us; but rather to be hanged as common pirates."

"You have the courage of ignorance," Barcus replied coolly. "If you'll take the trouble to glance astern——"

Alan sat up with a start to see behind them the milk-white sails of an able schooner.

Sheets all taut and every inch of canvas fat with a beam wind, she footed it merrily in their wake, a silver jet spouting from her cutwater.

CHAPTER XXI

Crack o' Doom

MR. LAW'S capacity for surprise was exhausted. He viewed the schooner with no more display of emotion than resided in narrowing eyelids and tightening muscles about his mouth.

"Much farther to go?" he inquired presently.

"At our present pace—say two hours."

"And can we hold our own?"

"Just about," Barcus allowed.

"Anything to be done?"

"Nothing but pray, if you remember how."

Later, however, after another glance astern, Barcus revised this opinion. "Take the wheel and let me have a squint at that engine. She ought to have more power than she's developing just now. . . . No good," he soon reported briefly, taking the wheel again; "she'll go just so fast and no faster."

As the next hour wore itself out, it was seen that the pursuer was gaining. Inch by inch she crept up in the wake of her prey; and they counted surely on being overhauled by the time they could effect a landing, if not before.

In the end, however, they made it by the narrowest margin. The features of Judith Trine, watching them from the schooner's side, were distinctly revealed in the chill gray light of the early dawn as they aimed for the first fair landing on the main waterfront of the city.

Long since Alan had wakened Rose and brought her on deck. With matchless seamanship, Barcus laid the smaller boat smoothly alongside the wharf. By the time they had climbed to the street level the schooner was scraping the piles at the end of the dock.

Alan swept the neighbouring street with a hungry glance. There was neither policeman, nor watchman, nor motor-car in sight. If they ran for it, they must surely be overtaken. Something must be done to hinder the crew of the schooner from landing.

"Here!" he cried sharply to Barcus. "You take Rose, hurry to the street, and find that motor-car. I *know* she's there; Digby never failed me yet!"

"But you——?"

"Don't waste time. I'll be with you in three shakes. I've got a scheme!"

Urged frantically, the reluctant pair made off at a round pace. Then bare-handed and alone, he turned back to oppose his strength and courage and wits against a dozen.

As for his scheme, Alan Law had none other than to give battle, and sacrifice himself, if need be. His eye lighted on a four-foot length of stout three-inch oak scantling—an excellently formidable club.

Snatching this up, he pelted down the wharf, arriving at the end barely in time to oppose the first man who landed from the schooner. This one the club took on the side of the head; he fell without a murmur. The one who followed took a cracked crown back to the schooner's deck. The third brought a capstan-bar and proved more difficult to deal with. Others were swarming to his aid when a swing of the bar knocked Alan's club from his grasp. But his opponent was luckless; before he could recover from the sweep of his blow, Alan had landed on his chin a fist that had all his heart and soul behind it. A flourishing pair of heels and a ringing thump on the schooner's deck finished that episode.

But now, disarmed, Alan's case was desperate. He was being surrounded.

Wildly casting about for some weapon, he leaped toward a pyramid of little but heavy kegs, and seizing one, swung it overhead and cast it full force into the midriff of his nearest enemy; so that this one doubled up convulsively, with a sickish grunt, and vanished in turn over the end of the

ROSE'S HEART TREMBLED AS SHE LISTENED TO THE SECRET.

ROSE NESTLED CLOSER, FEARING SHE KNEW NOT WHAT.

wharf. His fellow followed with less injury, in his effort to escape a second hurtling keg, which, meeting with no resistance, pursued him even to the deck, where the force of its impact split its seams.

None of the combatants noticed that the powder that filtered out was black and coarse. Alan, indeed, had only the haziest notion that gunpowder kegs were his ammunition. He had discharged the last of a dozen more when he became aware that Judith had climbed up the rigging and, lightly poised, was drawing a revolver preparatory to coming ashore.

In the same breath he heard a friendly shout of warning far up the dock, and knew that Barcus was coming to his aid.

Judith's revolver fell level with his head, and he thought that his last minute had dawned. He made a forlorn attempt to dash in under the weapon and grapple with her, but it was not that which caused the weapon, even as the woman pulled the trigger, to lift from its deadly aim and explode harmlessly in the air. Alan closed with her, wrested the pistol from her grasp, and mechanically tossed it aside. It went over the end of the wharf and fell on the deck of the schooner.

It was an old-fashioned weapon, and the force with which it struck the deck released the hammer.

Instantly a .44 cartridge blazed into the open head of a broken powder keg.

With a roar like the Trump of Doom a mighty gust of flame and smoke broke forth, and the decks of the schooner were riven and shattered; her masts tottered and fell. . . .

CHAPTER XXII

Juggernaut

ALAN came to himself supported by Barcus, his senses still reeling from the concussion of that thunderbolt which he had so unwittingly loosed —the cloud of sulphurous smoke not yet dissipated by the wind. Judith lay at his feet, stunned; and round about other figures, of men insensible, if not, for all he could say, dead.

And then Barcus was hustling him down the wharf.

"Come! Come!" he rallied Alan. "Pull yourself together. Rose is waiting in the car, and if you don't want to be arrested you'll stir your stumps, my son! That explosion is going to bring New Bedford buzzing round our ears like a swarm of hornets!"

His prediction was justified, for just then a policeman appeared as if by magic. Brandishing his night-stick, he made for Alan, as if instinctively recognizing the cause of the disaster, and would have done him serious injury had not Barcus flung himself at the officer's legs, tackling clean and low.

They went down with a crash, and the fight was on; but Barcus managed to shriek:

"Run, you simp, run! Make your getaway with Rose while the going's good! I can take care of myself."

At the same time a hand descended on Alan's shoulder, and he found himself in the grasp of a pugnaciously inclined citizen who reaped unhappy reward for his temerity, being tripped and thrown as Alan realized that Barcus was right—that his first duty was to Rose.

Whereupon he swung about, butted his way through a group of three confused and strong-lunged persons, and in three bounds gained the running-board of the waiting motor-car, in whose body Rose was standing as if half-minded to alight.

"Clear out!" he told the chauffeur violently. "Make yourself scarce!"

As the man hesitated, Alan threw him bodily from the car, dropped into his seat, and threw in the clutch. They were a hundred feet distant from the scene of the accident before Alan was fairly settled in his place. Alan shook himself together and drew upon the lore of a master of motoring. The car shot through that street like a hunted shadow.

As he grew more and more calm, he congratulated himself on the car. If not capable of a racing pace, it would serve his ends as speedily as was consistent with reasonable care for the life of the woman he loved.

Yet his congratulations were premature, they were not ten minutes out of the environs of the city when Rose left her seat and knelt behind his, to communicate the intelligence that they were already being pursued by a heavy touring-car, driven by a man, a woman in the seat by his side—Judith the latter, the man an old employee of her father by the name of Marrophat.

Marrophat!

He looked back, recognized this Marrophat as well as Judith, and realized that theirs was the faster machine.

They could overtake the fugitives practically when they would. Why did they not do so at once? They must be awaiting a favourable opportunity. Ah, well, he would——

And then, quite clearly, he recognized the time and the place in the character of the road that lay before him as the car sped like a dragonfly down a slight grade. From the bottom of the grade it swung away in a wide curve, bordered for some distance by railroad tracks on a slightly lower level.

He had guessed the fiendish plan of the other driver only too truly. As they approached at express speed the stretch where the roar paralleled the tracks Alan sought to hug the left-hand side of the road, but in vain.

Roaring, with its muffler cut out, the pursuing

car swept up and baffled him, bringing its right forward wheel up beside the left rear wheel of his car, then more slowly forging up until, with its weight, bulk, and superior power, it forced him inch by inch to the right, toward the tracks, until his right-hand wheels left the road and ran on uneven turf, until the left-hand wheels as well lost grip on the road metal, until the car began to dip on the slope to the tracks.

He heard the far *hoot-toot* of a freight locomotive. There followed a maniac moment, when the world was upside down. Alan's car slipped and skidded, swung sideways with frightful momentum toward the tracks, caught its wheels against the ties, and. . . .

The sun swung in the heavens like a ball on a string. There was a crash, a roar. There was nothing—oblivion. . . .

The car had turned turtle, pinning Rose and Alan beneath it.

And there was something very like a miracle in all this: for neither was killed, nor even injured beyond bruises. Alan started back to consciousness to find himself inextricably jammed beneath the machine, only his head and shoulders protruding, and in the same moment found himself looking into the eyes of Rose and heard her voice.

"Alan!" she gasped. "You are not killed?"

"No—not even much hurt, I fancy," he replied. "And you?"

"Not much——"

The deep-throated roar of the locomotive bellowing danger silenced him. He closed his eyes.

Then abruptly the weight was lifted from his chest. He saw a man dragging Rose from under the machine, and saw that the man was Marrophat. And almost immediately some one lifted his head and shoulders, caught him with two hands beneath his armpits, and drew him clear of the machine. And the face of the rescuer was the face of Judith Trine.

The crash he had expected, of the car being crumpled up by the oncoming locomotive, did not follow. As he scrambled to his feet, his first glance was up the track, and discovered the train slowing to a halt.

His next was one of wonder for the countenance of Judith Trine as she stood, at a little distance, regarding him: her look a curious compound of relief, regret, hatred, love.

His third glance described beyond her the figure of Marrophat carrying Rose in his arms, stumbling as he ran toward his car on the highroad.

He moved to pursue, but found his way barred by Judith.

"No!" she cried. "No, you shall not——"

Her hand caught the grip of a revolver that protruded from her pocket.

"You will never have the courage to pull that trigger when I'm helpless in your hands!"

The hot blood mantled her exquisite face like red fire. She caught her breath with a sob, then flung wildly at him:

"Well, if you must know—it's true. I can't bring myself to kill you. For all that, you shall die—I could not save you if I would! And this I promise you, you shall never see Rose again before you die!"

And while he stood gaping, she ran, quickly covering the little distance between him and the car. As she jumped into this and dropped down upon the seat beside her half-conscious sister, Marrophat swung the car away.

It vanished in a dust-cloud as a throng of railroad employees surrounded and assailed him with clamorous questions.

CHAPTER XXIII

The House Divided

ALONE—chained to the invalid chair wherein, day in, day out, for years on end, he had suffered the Promethean torments of the life that would not die out of his wretched carcass—Seneca Trine sat waiting, with the impassivity of a graven figure.

"Another hour! . . . In sixty minutes more they will be here, Judith and Marrophat and Rose—poor fool—and *him!* They will put him down before me, bound and helpless, if not dead . . ."

A slight pause prefaced words that were a whimpered prayer: "God grant that Alan Law may be laid down still living here at my feet! Then . . . "

A bitter smile twisted his tortured features. "When I have seen him die as his father died—then—ah, God!—then at last I, too, may die!"

There was a long silence, then a groan of exasperated protest: "Why do they not come? Why does Judith delay? She must have found so many opportunities to leap and strike, why has she always failed? Where is that message she sent me yesterday?"

His one sound hand groped out and sought a mass of papers on the desk beside him, sorting out from among then two yellow forms. Painfully he blinked over these and slowly his pain-bent lips conned their wording.

"*Alan and Rose safe with me—will bring both home to-morrow night without fail,*" he read the first aloud, and then the second: "*Have motor-car waiting for me to-morrow morning from three o'clock till called for—New Bedford waterfront—Judith.*"

"No!" he affirmed with the fervour of one persuaded by his own desires, "I must not doubt the girl! Patience!" he whispered, and, closing his eyes, rested his head against the back of the chair and was for a long time still. . . . But when the girl entered softly, as if fearful of disturbing his slumbers, she found him with head erect and eyes ablaze.

"Judith!" he cried, his great voice vibrating like a brazen bell. "At last! You have brought him? Where is he?" The girl dropped her head. After an instant of incredulous disappointment the man shot a single, frigid question at her.

"You have failed?"

"I have failed," she confessed.

"Why?"

She shrugged slightly. "Who knows why one fails? I did my best; he was too much for me, out-

witted me at every turn, and now I bring you only Rose."

She faltered, awed by the glare of his infuriated eyes. "Let me explain," she begged.

He snapped her short. "There is something beneath this, something you will not tell me."

His hand sought the row of buttons on the desk and pressed one long. Almost instantly a servant glided into the room.

"My daughter Rose—have her brought here to me at once!"

In another moment the replica of his daughter Judith was ushered into his presence.

Upon this one he loosed the lightnings of his wrath without ruth. They met for the first time since she had mutinied against him, and left his roof to go to the lover whose life her father sought.

Rose suffered him in silence. His most galling recrimination educed no retort. But she listened with covert avidity, hoping that some word of his might betray the secret of her lover's fate since she had been torn from his protection. That word, however, did not come before Judith stirred her sister's temper beyond control.

In a lull in Trine's tirade, Judith chose to interject: "Don't be so hard on the silly fool, she's not responsible, she's sick with love for that good-looking simpleton!"

"And you!" Rose turned on her passionately. "What about you? If I love Alan Law, at least I love him openly. I'm not ashamed to own it—and I don't pursue him, as you do, pretending I mean to sacrifice him to a wicked family feud, and then spare him, as you do, hoping so to work upon his sympathies. There," she cried to her father, "there stands the daughter who has betrayed your faith."

The retort on Judith's lips was checked by her father's gesture and a word that rang through the room like the tolling of a bell. "*Silence!*"

Abashed, she averted her face and hung her head.

"I think," Trine announced in a voice of ice, "I have learned now what I needed to know."

His fingers sought the row of buttons, and when a servant responded, he inquired.

"Mr. Marrophat has returned?"

"He is in the waiting-room, sir."

"Conduct Miss Judith Trine to him and tell him I hold him personally responsible for her safekeeping. He will understand."

"Very good, sir."

"No!" Trine silenced Judith's attempt to protest and exculpate herself, "not another word. Go!"

Sullenly the girl obeyed.

And for a long time thereafter the father, alone with Rose, essayed in vain to break down her mutinous silence.

Only, in the end, he was able to shatter her calm by a remark so uttered as to seem an inadvertent avowal that he had already brought about the assassination of her lover. Even that failed of its purpose, for her taciturnity yielded only to hysteria; and realizing that he wasted breath, Trine summoned two of his creatures and had her led weeping from the room to be held prisoner in her bedchamber on the topmost floor of the house.

CHAPTER XXIV

II—A Sporting Offer

THAT same evening Mr. Alan Law issued forth from the Grand Central Station, hailed a taxicab, had himself conveyed to the Hotel Monolith, and registered as Arthur Lawrence.

But it was his true name that he gave to the person whom he called up on the telephone after being shown to his rooms. But then he was speaking to his old friend and man of business, Mr. Digby. Within another ten minutes this last was in conference with his employer.

"I think you must be out of your head," Digby insisted nervously, once their first greetings were over. "You in New York while Trine lives and knows you're this side of the water! It was dangerous enough before, when we had every reason to believe he was satisfied with having caused your father's death. But now——"

He fluttered his hands in a panicky gesture.

"Nonsense!" Alan laughed. "Remember this is New York, with a policeman on every corner!"

"Are you really so infatuated as to repose faith

in the protective powers of the police?" Digby demanded.

"Well, I saw one of 'em do some rather efficient scrapping this morning!" Alan paused and smote his palm with a remorseful fist. "By the Eternal, I'm forgetting poor Barcus!"

"Barcus?"

"Chap whose boat I chartered into Portland—sheer luck on my part—he's one of the salt of the earth. I left him on the waterfront there at dawn, mixing it up with the police force in order to divert their minds from Rose and me. It's too long to tell now. First, something must be done for the boy. You've got influence of some sort in New Bedford, surely?"

Digby reflected. "There's George Blaine, justice of the peace——'

"The very man! Telegraph him in Barcus's interests immediately. And telegraph Barcus as well. Send him a hundred for expenses and tell him to join me here in New York as quickly as he can!"

"Your friend's address?" Digby inquired, as he sat down at the desk and fumbled with the supply of hotel stationery.

"New Bedford jail, of course!" Alan chuckled, but cut his laugh in two as something fluttered from the pack of envelopes and fell to the floor between the two men. It was a Trey of Hearts.

"Now will you believe?" Digby demanded huskily.

"In what? A simple coincidence?" Alan flouted. "Take my word for it, this is nothing more nor less than a souvenir of a poker party held by yesterday's tenant of this suite."

"Perhaps—perhaps!" Digby assented, stroking his tremulous lips. "But I'm afraid for you. Do me this favour at least: do leave town—go incognito to some quiet place nearby and wait there for the sailing of the next trans-Atlantic steamer. Oh, surely you can't deny me this one wish of my fond old heart, my boy!"

With unfeigned affection Alan dropped a hand on Digby's shoulder.

"There's nothing on earth I would not do for you," he said. "But this thing—I can't do it, even for you. Rose Trine is here in New York, at the mercy of her father and sister; and you may judge what their mercy will be when you learn all that she has done for me. I can't go until I find her and take her with me."

"I have your word you'll go providing I find and restore Rose to you?"

"You have my word to that, unquestionably. Bring Rose to me, and I'll gladly shake the dust of New York from my shoes, and never return till Trine is dead."

"It shall be done," Digby promised. "It must!"

"You believe that?"

"In twelve hours Rose shall be restored to you."

"Will you make a book on it? If you believe you can carry out your promise, wire the White Star Line to reserve the best available suite on the *Oceanic*, sailing to-morrow morning at ten, and make arrangements for a marriage before the boat sails!"

"I'll go you," Digby agreed, "and if I fail, I forfeit the cost of the reservation. But about this marriage —you'll have to have a license in this State—and can't get one except by applying in person with your bride-to-be."

"Then we'll marry in Jersey," Alan insisted. "Dig up some clergyman over there, and tell him to be prepared to earn a heavy honorarium between seven and nine to-morrow morning."

"One moment; give me time to write these wires," Digby pleaded.

And to Alan's surprise the little man proceeded to compose the telegrams as if he really believed in his ability to make good his word.

CHAPTER XXV

The Time o' Night

WITH the further pledge that Alan would hear from him before dawn, the little brown man scuttled away. Not ill-pleased to be left to his own devices (whose proposed character Digby would never have approved had he so much as suspected them), Alan none the less deferred action until after midnight.

It was about one in the morning when he arrived, after taking elaborate precautions, in the neighbourhood of the Riverside Drive and before the home of his mortal enemy, a grim white house that towered, stark and tall, upon a corner. All its windows were dark but one—and that one, in the topmost tier, showed only a feeble glimmer, so slight that Alan almost overlooked it.

He believed with small doubt that Rose was a prisoner within those walls, and, this being the presumptive case, that small, high window of the light might well be hers. That it might equally well be another's was beside the point; the possibility remained, and while this was so he could not rest

without doing his best to learn the truth. Now one way of accomplishing this offered itself to his fertile and ardent imagination.

Directly across the street from the Trine residence a colossal apartment structure stood half-finished, the gaunt iron skeleton rearing a web of steel stencilled against the shining sky. After certain precautionary maneuvers, Alan approached the watchman's shelter of the unfinished tenement. To his infinite disgust, Alan found the guardian very wide awake. This in itself might have been deemed a suspicious circumstance; not for nothing does an honest night watchman so deny the laws of nature and the tenets of his craft. But Alan overcame with banknotes what seemed an uncommonly stubborn reluctance, and got his way.

He could not know that another skulked behind a barrier of lime barrels and overheard all that passed. All ignorant, the young man addressed himself to an uncommonly unpleasant climb. The ladders were crazily constructed and none too securely poised, but at length he gained the gridiron of girders on a plane with the lighted window across the way, and crept along one of these, gingerly on his hands and knees, until he came to its end, and might, if he cared to, look down a hundred feet to the sidewalks.

That view, however, did not tempt; he kept his eyes level, and was rewarded with a bare glimpse of a

prettily papered wall framed in the lace of half-drawn curtains. Something moved within the room, but beyond the range of his vision; he saw an indefinite shadow flicker across the wall, but more than that, nothing.

Behind him, grim, ravening death stalked Alan in the darkness. He had not the least suspicion that all was not well.

Of a sudden, the tenant of the room came to the window and stood there looking pensively out, altogether unconscious of the watcher. Was the woman Rose or Judith? That she was one of those he could plainly see. At last she revealed herself by a gesture indelibly stamped on tablets of his memory: a slight gesture of grave dubiety, fingertips lightly touching her lips and cheek. The woman in the window, then, was Rose.

He drew from his pocket a notebook, tore out a blank page, and with the assistance of a ray of moonlight, scrawled a message.

When he looked up from this task, she had vanished.

Sitting astride the girder, he took his watch—a cheap affair he had picked up when reclothing himself in the garments of civilized society at Providence that morning—opened the back of the case, and closed it upon the folded message. Then drawing back his arm, he cast it from him with such force

that it almost unseated him at the end of the swing. But nothing less would have served to bridge that yawning chasm. And the watch flew, straight and true, squarely through the lighted window and to the farther wall. . . .

That much he saw, but whether the girl came to the window after picking it up he never knew. In that very instant he heard a sound behind him of heavy breathing. The assassin had come close upon his prey when Alan turned and discovered his peril. Crawling, as Alan had crawled, on hands and knees along the girder, the man had inched up within a yard.

The moonbeam which had aided Alan in the composition of his message struck across the other's face and showed it like a mask of deadly hatred, with its eyeballs glaring and its lips drawn back from the naked blade gripped between its teeth—a stiletto nothing sort of a foot in length.

With a low cry of desperation Alan snatched off his hat, a soft and shapeless felt affair, and flung it squarely in the fellow's face. Before he could recover—before, that is, it dropped away and cleared his vision—Alan had bent forward and grasped the wrist of the hand that held the knife. He snatched simultaneously at the other hand, but it eluded him.

Immediately the two became engaged in a furious contest for possession of the stiletto. Alan had this

advantage, as long as the knife might not strike, that his right arm was free, while the assassin had only his left. With this he strove to reach his knife-hand and possess himself of the weapon. As persistently Alan foiled his purpose by dragging the knife-hand toward him and swinging it far out to one side. At the same time he struck repeatedly with his clenched right fist at the other's face. As often as not his blows failed to land; when they did land, it was lightly, for the most part; the distance between them was just a bit beyond his reach, the assassin could dodge a blow by drawing back his head, and Alan dared not unlock his feet beneath the girder in order to inch forward within better range. His blows did little damage beyond disconcerting the other, but this proved a very considerable factor in the duel. In the end they served, together with that steady, resistlessly downward and outward drag, to break the grip of the man's locked legs.

He pitched forward on his face along the girder, kicking wildly, grasping at the air. The stiletto fell and disappeared. Before Alan could release his hold, or ease the strain upon the right arm of the assassin, the fellow had slipped from the girder and hung helpless in space, dangling at the end of Alan's arm—with no more than the grip of five fingers between him and death.

Then the battle began anew, but now it was a

battle with a man half-crazed with fright and struggling so madly that he well-nigh frustrated the efforts of his rescuer.

Its progress remained forever a blank in Alan's memory. He knew that he was doing his best to save an enemy from annihilation: that was all. How he contrived to lift the fellow with his left arm high enough to get a grip on his collar and hold him so until his arms caught the girder and he was able to help himself up—with much assistance—was something inexplicable.

Yet it happened so, in the upshot, the assassin lay like a limp rag across the girder, head and arms hanging on one side, legs and feet on the other, spent with his terrific exertions and physically sick with terror. In this state Alan left him; he had done enough; let the man shift for himself from this time on.

Cautiously crawling over the other's body, he edged along to the head of the ladder. When he looked back from safety, the cut-throat lay as Alan had left him, kicking convulsively. And the window across the way was blank.

Reflecting that little noise had marked the progress of that duel in the dark, that Rose in consequence could hardly have known anything of it, he let himself down story by story to the street, and made off without pausing to see whether the night watchman's blatant slumbers were real or feigned.

CHAPTER XXVI

Changeling

AT DAWN Judith rose and bathed and dressed herself in negligee. In the adjoining room she could hear small, stealthy noises—the sounds made by her sister moving about and preparing against the unguessable moment when her rescue would be attempted, according to the information conveyed in that midnight message.

For, by chance, Judith had been in the recess of her darkened window when Alan edged out along the girder, on the building opposite. Judith recognized him at the moment when he was inditing his message, while grim death stalked him from behind.

She had seen him throw the watch and she had witnessed with wildly beating heart that duel in the air, unable to surmise its outcome only from the fact that the victor spared the life of the vanquished.

The infatuate chivalry of that man! . . .

A dozen emotions tore at her heart. She was estranged from her father. She was at odds with his creature, Marrophat, because she had repulsed his overtures at love-making. And the old con-

tempt in which she had ever held her sister Rose had been transmuted into violent hatred.

And it had been her destiny to learn to love the man who loved her sister and was loved by her in turn.

That she could no longer suffer this state of affairs to endure was the one clear fact on the horizon of her tempestuous soul. The clock was striking six as she left her room; across the street workingmen were about to begin the labours of the day. Brushing past the guard outside the door to Rose's room, Judith turned the key that remained in the lock on the outside, removed it, entered, and locked the door behind her.

Without any surprise she found her sister already dressed to the point of donning her outer garments. Rendered half-frantic by this unexpected interruption, threatening as it did the perilous scheme that Alan had proposed, Rose greeted her sister with a countenance at once aghast and wrathful.

"What do you want?" she demanded. "I insist that you leave this room at once!"

"I may leave this room, and I may not, dear little sister. But one of us will never leave it alive."

"Judith!"

"One moment!" Crossing to a side table, Judith took up a glass from a tray that held a silver water-pitcher, and returned with it to the table that occupied the middle of the floor. At the same time

she opened a hand till then fast clenched and discovered a small blue bottle with a red label shrieking the warning "POISON!"

"Strychnine," she explained composedly, "in solution," and emptied the bottle into the glass.

A measure of courage returned to Rose. "Do you expect to be able to make me drink that?" she demanded.

"Not I—but Destiny, if it will! See here!" From a pocket of her dressing-gown Judith produced a sealed deck of playing cards. "Let these declare the will of Destiny toward us. I will break the seal, shuffle the cards, and deal," she explained, suiting action to the word. "The one who gets the Trey of Hearts will drain that glass. Is it a bargain?"

"Never! Oh, now I know that you are altogether mad!"

Whipping a small revolver from another pocket of her dressing-gown, Judith placed it on the table, ready to her hand.

"You will shoot me if I do not consent?"

"Not you, but him. If you refuse, little sister, I will shoot Alan Law dead when he comes to keep his appointment with you."

"Ah!" Rose cried in mingled fright and amazement, "how did you find out——"

"Never mind. Is it a bargain?"

With a shudder Rose bowed her head.

"Deal—and may God judge between us!"

One by one Judith stripped the cards from the top of the deck, dealing first to Rose, then to herself. Twelve had been dealt when she held her hand an instant.

"I have a premonition about thirteen," she said, with a cruel smile for Rose.

But the card that fell to Rose was a Queen of Hearts.

"Another superstition gone smash!" Judith commented, and dealt herself the Trey of Hearts.

Judith's hand moved steadily toward the glass.

"Judith! you cannot mean to drink it?"

With a strangled cry, Rose covered her face with her hands to shut out the sight, stood momentarily swaying, and dropped to the floor in a complete faint.

Judith carried the glass to her lips, but before she could tilt it, her glance darted through the window and saw that which caused her to stay her hand. On the topmost tier of girders of the building opposite Alan Law stood amid a little knot of amused and animated labourers, one foot in the great steel hook of the hoisting tackle. As Judith stared, he waved a hand to some person invisible.

Immediately the arm began to lift, the tackle to move slowly through the blocks. Very gently he was swung up and outward. . . .

With a cry Judith flung the poison from her, leaped

across the room, snatched up the street garments Rose had dropped, and struggled madly into them.

Before the shadow of Alan, clinging to the hook and chain, fell athwart the window, she was dressed, and clambered out upon the sill.

The hook hung steady within six inches of the window-ledge. Alan extended his arm.

"Nothing to fear, except lest I hold you too tight, dear one!"

Without a word Judith set her foot beside his in the hook, surrendered to his embrace, and closed her eyes. Immediately they were swung away from the window, over toward the opposite sidewalk, and gently lowered to the street.

"Safe and sound—and not a soul over there the wiser as yet," he declared with a derisive nod toward the home of Trine. "Come along! Here's a limousine waiting. In twenty minutes we'll be at the ferry, in forty over in Jersey, within an hour married, within four hours safe at sea!"

She made the need for haste cover her consternation. And when they were safely ensconced in the town-car and swiftly tearing downtown—the time was not yet. She could not declare herself. Nor could she refuse his endearments, who had gone so long athirst for them. So that presently she was returning them passionately—and the infamy of it all was dim and blurred in her understanding.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Ring

THEIRS was the last vehicle to swing between the gates of the Twenty-third Street ferry before these last were closed.

And this was well, for Alan, glancing through the rear window, started involuntarily when he descried a powerful touring-car tearing toward the ferry-house, its one passenger half rising from the front seat, beside the driver, and exhibiting a countenance purple with congested chagrin as he saw his car barred out of the carriage entrance.

The girl caught nervously at Alan's hand.

"What is it, dear?"

He made a gesture of exasperation.

"Marrophat," he snapped.

She uttered a hushed cry of dismay. But at that instant the taxicab rolled aboard the ferry-boat, the deck gates were closed, a hoarse whistle rent the roaring silence of the city, winches rattled and chains clanked, and the boat wore ponderously out of its slip.

"So much for Mr. Marrophat!" Alan crowed, sitting

down. "Foiled again! But what I want to know is how the deuce did he get such an accurate line on my plans? How did he know that I was coming here, to the Erie Ferry? It passes me. However, he can't stop us now."

"This isn't the only ferry. There's the Pennsylvania and the Lackawanna—and by hard driving he might even manage to catch the boat that connects with this from the Christopher Street ferry of the Erie!"

"Impossible! I don't believe it! I won't!"

But the incident had served appreciably to chill their spirits. They accomplished the remainder of that voyage in a silence that was no less depressed because they sat hand in hand throughout.

Nor was their taxicab three minutes out of the ferry-house on the Jersey shore when the girl's fears were amply justified; a shout from behind drew Alan's head out of the window. Marrophat's touring-car was within fifty yards, and Marrophat, standing on the running-board, was shouting inarticulately and flourishing an imperative hand; while the distance between them was momentarily growing less noticeable—since the taxi-motor was not to be expected to develop sufficient power to maintain its lead on a six-cylinder car of the latest and most powerful model.

As Marrophat's car drew abreast Alan said quietly:

"Don't be alarmed, I can attend to this gentleman single-handed."

And this he proceeded to demonstrate with admirable ease, even though called upon to do so far sooner than he had thought to be—thanks to Marrophat's harebrained precipitancy. For Trine's first lieutenant now took his life in his hands and in one bound bridged the distance between the flying cars and landed on the taxi's running-board.

"Stop!" he screamed madly. "Stop, I say! You don't know what you're doing! Let me tell you——'

He got that far but no farther. In the same breath Alan had flung wide the door and was at the fellow's throat. There was a struggle of negligible duration. Marrophat was in no way his antagonist's match; within three seconds he threw out both hands, clutched hopelessly at the framework of the cab, and fell heavily to the street.

Simultaneously the touring-car dropped back and stopped.

The taxi sped on and Alan looked back in time to catch a glimpse of a number of loafers lifting Marrophat to his feet.

"Not seriously injured, I fancy," he told the girl. "Worse luck!" he added gloomily.

But it seemed that he was to have greater cause than this to complain of his luck before that ride was ended. Three blocks farther on a tire blew out

and the taxi slowed down and limped dejectedly to the curb.

Alan and the chauffeur piled out in the same instant, the one standing guard—with an eye out as well for another cab—while the other assessed damages.

"Nothing for it but a new tire, sir," the chauffeur reported sympathetically.

"Go to it," Alan advised him tersely, "and if you make a quick job of it I'll make it worth your while. Here's my card."

The man took the card, and, after a glance at the name, touched his hat with more noticeable respect.

"All right, Mr. Law," he agreed, "anything you say." And forthwith got to work.

The rapidity with which he completed the change of tires proved him an excellent chauffeur, an adept at his craft; but the delay was one disastrous for all that. The touring-car came in sight just as they were off again, but for the time being contented itself with trailing about fifty feet in the rear, while the taxi fled the Hoboken waterfront and found its way into the broader streets of a suburban quarter.

When they were well into this last, the touring-car drew in swiftly and Marrophat, rising in his seat, levelled a revolver over the windshield and fired. The crack of his weapon was coincident with a metallic thud beneath the rear seat of the taxicab.

ALAN'S GUN DISAPPEARS WHILE HE SLEEPS.

IT WAS A MAD CHANCE ALAN TOOK TO SAVE THIS GIRL.

With a satisfied leer Marrophat settled back and pocketed his revolver.

Surmising that the gasoline tank had been punctured by the bullet, he was inclined to believe that Marrophat hoped to stop the taxicab by depriving it, in course of time, of its fuel. With this in mind he was presently surprised to see Marrophat's car stop and Marrophat himself get down. The brow of a hill intervened, shutting off sight of the blackguard as he knelt and lit a match. It was the girl who gave the alarm, suddenly withdrawing her head from the window.

"He's fired the gasoline! It's flaming along the street, following the line of the leak—and catching up with us."

Without pausing to put his hand to the latch, Alan kicked the door open.

"Jump!" he cried. "For your life—jump! As soon as that flame catches up with the tank——"

Simultaneously the chauffeur, overhearing, shut off the power. The three gained the sidewalk barely in time. In the flutter of an eyelash the explosion followed. There was a roar—and then a heap of smoking ruins.

Without waiting to admire the spectacle, Alan caught the arm of the girl and hurried her up the street. Chance brought them to the next corner as another cab, fareless, hove into view. Promising its

driver anything he might ask, Alan gave him the address, and helped the girl in. The second car made better time than the first, and soon swept up to a corner house of modest and homely aspect. Two minutes more, and Alan was exchanging salutations with Digby's good friend, the Reverend Mr. Wright.

Embarrassment worked confusion with the young man's perceptive faculties. He was dimly aware of a decently furnished minister's study; of two witnesses, womenfolk of the minister's household; of the Reverend Mr. Wright himself as a benevolent voice rolling sonorously forth from a black-clad presence; of the woman of his heart standing opposite him; of questions asked and responses made; of a ring that was magically conjured from some store apparently maintained against precisely similar emergencies; of a hand that took the hand that was to be his wife's and placed it in his; of his clumsy and witless bungling with the task of fitting that ring to the finger of his sweetheart's hand. . . .

And then a door banged violently in the hallway; a man's voice made some indistinguishable demand; Rose's hand was suddenly whipped away before he could fit on the ring; the study door was flung open, and Marrophat precipitated himself into the room.

"You fool! Drop that ring! Stop this farce! Don't you know who you're marrying? That woman is Judith Trine—not Rose!"

Blankly Alan turned to the girl. The manner and look of Rose had dropped from her like a cast garment, confessing the truth of Marrophat's assertion. And as if this were not enough, Judith confessed it doubly with a sudden outbreak of characteristic rage.

"You devil!" she cried to Marrophat. "Keep out of my way forever after this, or take the consequences! God knows," she panted, "why I don't kill you as you stand!"

The front door slammed behind the girl.

When Alan, the first to recover, gained the sidewalk, she was already in the taxicab. Whatever reward she had promised the man, he whipped his machine away as if from the fear of sudden death. Darting from the house, Marrophat leaped into his own car and tore off in pursuit.

To the speaker's side another ranged, eying Alan with a formidable scowl. An elbow planted heavily in the pit of the stomach of one disposed of him for the time being. A blow from the shoulder sent the other reeling to the gutter. And Alan was in the tenement's lowermost hall. Sounds of scuffling feet were audible on the first landing. Alan addressed himself impetuously to the staircase, gaining its top in half a dozen leaps, and only in time to see a door slammed at the forward end of the hall and hear a key turned in its lock.

A cluster of men blocked his way. He threw himself headlong into their midst, and gained the closed door before they sought to stay him.

He shook the knob and shouted: "Rose! Rose!"

Her cry came back to him, a muffled scream: "Alan! Help! Help!"

Backing away with a mad idea of throwing himself bodily against the door and breaking it down, he was suddenly confronted by a hideously menacing face.

Without the hesitation of a heart-beat Alan swung heavily for the thug's jaw. The blow went solidly home. The man fell like a poled ox.

Pendemonium ensued. Rallying to their comrade, the ruffians attacked Alan with one mind and one intent. Simultaneously the lamp on the wall was struck from its bracket and crashed to the floor,

its glass well breaking and loosing a flood of kerosene to receive the burning wick. The explosion followed instantly. In a trice the hallway was a lake of burning oil.

Still fighting like a madman, contesting every foot of the way, Alan was borne downstairs by the fleeing mob and out of the front door. The doorway vomited men and women of the tenement. By the time they left the way clear a solid wall of flame stood behind it.

Thrice Alan essayed to pass that barrier of fire, and thrice it threw him back.

Then drawing aside, he endeavoured to come to his sober senses, and cast about for some more feasible way to effect the rescue of his Rose.

That way was revealed to him in another instant.

The tenement occupied one corner of a narrow street and directly opposite stood a storage warehouse. Before this last was the common landing stage for truck deliveries protected by a shed roof. And, suspended from a timber that peered out over the eaves, a hoisting tackle dragged the ground with its ropes.

It was the work of another minute to rig a loop in the line and fasten it round his body beneath the arms. Volunteers did not lack—a couple of husky longshoremen sprang to the ropes. They heaved with a will. His feet left the ground. He caught the

eaves of the shed roof and drew himself up on this last, back a little way down it, and calculating his direction nicely, with a running jump launched himself out over the street.

The momentum of his leap carried him truly toward that window where Rose was waiting. Then its force slackened. For an awful instant he believed that he had failed. But with the last expiring ounce of impetus he was brought within grasping distance of the window-sill.

Hauling himself up, he gathered her into his arms. . . . .

A great tongue of flames licked angrily out of the window as he swung her back to safety.

CHAPTER XXIX

JAILBIRD

THE period of restraint in durance vile suffered by one Thomas Barcus proved in the upshot far more brief than had been fondly hoped not only by his just judge but, singularly enough, by the misdemeanant himself.

"Ten days' rest will do me no harm," he assured himself. So meditating, he committed himself, body and soul, to the sleep he so sorely needed.

But his rest was to be by no means so long. He was sentenced at 10 A. M., and it was little short of 10 P. M. of the same day when his repose was disturbed by the rattle of a key in the lock of the door to his cell.

Sitting up, Mr. Barcus rubbed his eyes and combed his hair with his fingers.

"What did I tell you?" he observed resignedly. "It begins again already. . . ."

He was conducted to the presence of the judge himself, who at once ordered his release.

"If only you had told me you were a friend of Mr. Digby's," the judge hastened to say as soon as the

two were ensconced in the privacy of the judicial limousine, "I would have known better how to guide myself in this unfortunate affair. As it is, I can only assure you of my profound regret that I was not better advised. And I trust sincerely that you will not fail to tell Mr. Digby that I acted immediately on receipt of his telegram."

"Rest easy, I won't forget," Barcus promised him enigmatically, at pains to cover the truth that Digby was nothing more to him than the name of Alan Law's man of business.

"This is what Mr. Digby says," the judge replied, laboriously deciphering the message by the light of a match: "'Please see to immediate release of one Thomas Barcus probably in jail in your jurisdiction for rioting on waterfront this morning. Pay his fine and instruct him to report to me in New York at earliest feasible hour. Give him all the money he wants and look to me for remuneration'——"

The private comment of Barcus to this was: "I've suspected that this was a fairy-tale all along. Now I *know* it is!"

Not until a sound night's sleep had topped off the beginning of his rest in jail did Barcus come down to earth. He demonstrated his return to common sense by making a round breakfast in Grand Central Station before looking up the residence of Digby in the telephone directory, reasoning that, if he was to

rejoin his fortunes to those of Alan Law, it was best to be fortified in every conceivable way before delivering himself anew to a career of peril and privation.

The information he garnered from Mr. Digby over the telephone shook only momentarily Barcus's conviction that intimate acquaintance with battle, murder, and sudden death was the inevitable reward of association with this friend of his heart.

"Alan being married to Rose Trine in Jersey City at this very minute!" he breathed, as he emerged from the booth memorizing the address of the officiating clergyman. "I don't believe it; the course of true love can't be running as smooth as all that. Why, its impossible! Alan hasn't ridden the tidal wave yet, nor tamed the bucking earthquake! He has thus far flirted with death in little more than two-score different forms; if this is his finish, he's a rank quitter—hardly half a hero!"

Forthwith he engaged a taxicab to convey him to Jersey City.

"I'd give my earldom," he asseverated, "rather than miss the eruption, or whatever it is, that is bound to take place just in time to crab this unnatural dénouement!"

And when he beheld a dense volume of smoke advertising a conflagration on the Jersey shore, he shook a sagacious head.

"If Alan isn't mixed up in that somehow," he declared, "I'm a sorry failure as a prophet of woe and disaster!"

There was as much intuitive apprehension as humour responsible for this remark; witness the fact that, on landing, he risked the delay required to turn aside and have a look at the fire.

It proved to be situated in the heart of a squalid slum. The firemen had already given up all hope, apparently, of saving anything but the adjoining buildings; that they had done their best was shown by the tangle of apparatus that cumbered the space within the fire-lines.

Mr. Barcus viewed the scene for some moments; then, tolerably satisfied that there was nothing here to excuse his "hunch" about Alan Law, was on the point of instructing his chauffeur to drive on when his attention was attracted by a curious movement in the throng of sightseers. A number of men began to force their way in a V-shaped wedge through the throng, making toward its very heart, the point on the fire-lines nearest the burning building.

What this meant, Mr. Barcus had not the slightest idea. But his attention was fixed by the face of a man who was following in the hollow of the V—an evil white face that seemed somehow vaguely familiar. It was several seconds before Barcus identified it as the face of the man who had borne Judith Trine

away in a motor-car from the New Bedford wharf the previous morning: beyond doubt one of Seneca Trine's first lieutenants.

At the same time, at the point where the V had paused, a wild uproar lifted up. A cry was audible—"Firebug! Lynch him! Lynch the firebug!" And at this the mob turned and streamed away in pursuit of an invisible quarry, who chose to attempt his escape by a route directly opposite to that which would have led him within view of Mr. Barcus.

Barcus was on the point of stepping out of his cab when he was stayed by sight of the evil white face returning, still in the hollow of the flying V. And now Barcus saw that the man of the white face was not alone. There was a woman with him. And, Barcus reflected, why might not this be Rose Trine, suffering new persecution at the hands of her unnatural father's creatures?

He was too far away to make sure, but he pointed White Face out to his chauffeur as the V reached a touring-car and the woman was lifted in (unresisting and apparently in a dead faint), and when the touring-car started away the taxicab of Mr. Barcus trailed it.

Ten minutes later, from the rear deck of a ferry-boat in midstream, a boat bearing back to New York not only the touring-car of White Face but the cab of Mr. Barcus, the latter gentleman witnessed an in-

cident of uncommon character, even for New York, wherein (we're told) anything may happen, and most things do.

He saw a young man, hatless, coatless, almost shirtless, tear down to the end of one of the Jersey wharves, his heels snapped at by a ravening rabble, which he was so desperately anxious to escape that he dived headforemost into the greasy, tide-twisted river.

He took the water neatly, came up ininjured and clear-headed, and without an instant's hesitation struck away toward the middle of the Hudson.

But he was not to make his getaway so easily. In a moment it was seen that he was being rapidly overtaken by a couple of harbour policemen in a dory.

During the breathless suspense of that chase the ferry-boat drew stolidly farther and still farther away from the scene. Barcus could not tell whether, as it seemed, the police-laden dory was really overhauling the swimmer, or whether the illusion of perspective deceived him. At all events, it seemed a frightfully near thing when the interruption befell which alone could have saved the man whom Barcus believed to be none other than Alan Law.

Out of the very sky dropped a hydroplane, cutting the water with a long graceful curve that brought it, almost at a standstill, directly to the head of the

swimmer, and at the same time forced the police-boat to sheer wildly off in order to escape collision.

Immediately the swimmer caught the pontoon of the hydroplane, pulled himself up out of the water, and clambered to the seat beside the aviator. Before he was fairly seated the plane was swinging back into its fastest pace. With the ease of a wild goose it left the water, described a wide circle above the bluffs of Weehawken, and swept away southward. In that quarter it was presently lost to the sight of Mr. Barcus, who gravely lifted his hat in parting salutation.

"You are a brave man, my friend," he apostrophized the spirit of Alan Law, "and an uncommon lucky one, and a bit of a damn fool into the bargain. But the more I see of you the more firmly I believe your own assertion that you were born to be hanged!"

CHAPTER XXX

Bird-man

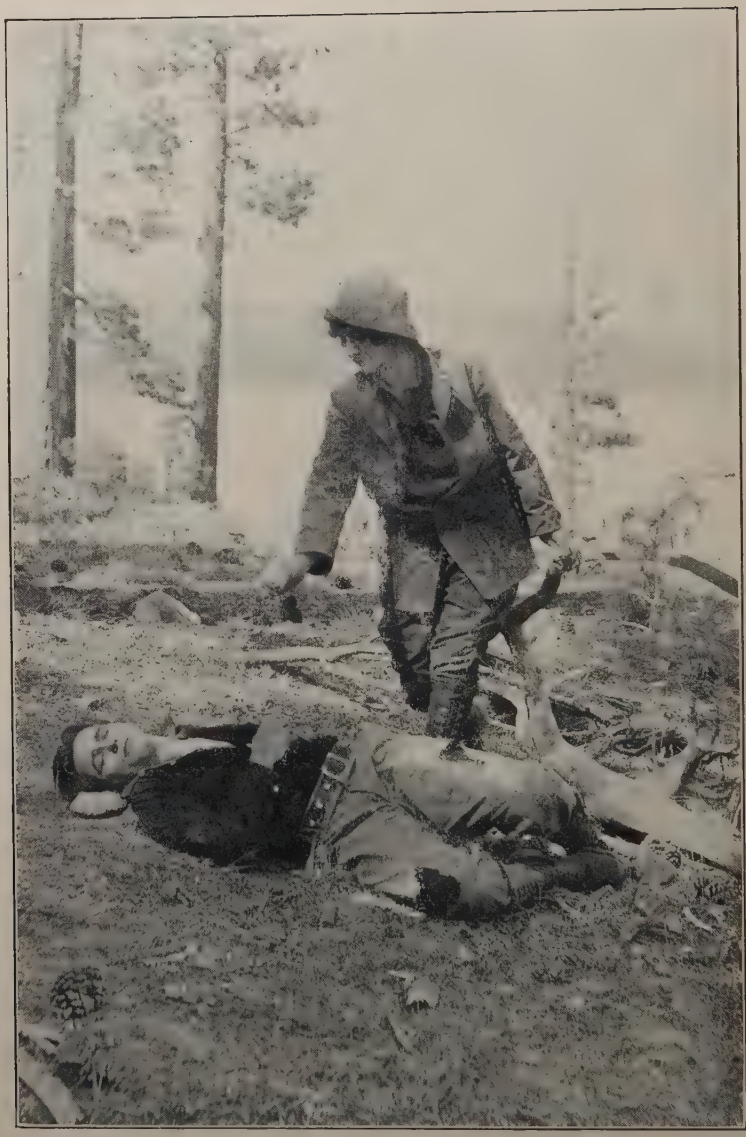
ABOUT eight o'clock in the evening of the same day a motor-car deposited at the Hotel Monolith a gentleman whose weather-beaten and oil-stained motoring-cap and duster covered little clothing more than shirt and trousers and assorted oddly in the eyes of the desk-clerk with the rather meticulously turned-out guest known to him as Mr. Arthur Lawrence, and to the management of the hotel as Mr. Alan Law incognito.

Eventually persuaded, the clerk yielded up the key to Mr. Lawrence's suite of rooms together with two notes superscribed with the same *nom de guerre*.

The first proved to be a characteristic communication:

"Dear Ulysses:—Thanks for the jail delivery. When I saw you snatched out of the North River this morning I was engaged in trailing a pale-faced villain in a motor-car; he was a bold, bad kidnapper; Rose was in his power, as we say in such cases. I sleuthed after 'em, even to the house of Seneca Trine.

JUDITH AND HER GUIDE WERE PLUNGED INTO THE ICY WATERS.



JUDITH FELT THE FIRST QUICKENING OF LOVE FOR THE MAN SHE HAD MEANT TO KILL.

Later followed a furtive young man from the house of Trine to the office of the general manager of the New York Central, where he made arrangements for a special to convey the said Trine and retinue to Chicago. It leaves at three o'clock this afternoon. I was unable to ascertain whether Rose is to participate in this hegira, but I know I shall. I have bribed the train-crew to let me impersonate the porter. So, should you be moved to follow and succeed in catching up with us, and observe anybody who looks rather off-colour in the party, don't shoot, the said body will be Me.

"Yours for the quiet life,
"Tom Barcus."

The second note was a mere hurried scrawl:

"They are taking me West by special train—I don't know where or why. A servant has promised to see that this reaches you. Save me!"

Over this Alan wrinkled an incredulous nose. The hand was the hand of Rose, but the phraseology was not in her spirit. He picked up the envelope to compare the handwriting of the address with that of the enclosure—and shook out a Trey of Hearts.

This last was covered, as to its face, with a plainly written message:

"With the compliments of Seneca Trine to Alan Law. We are due in Chicago at eleven to-morrow

morning and leave immediately for the Pacific Coast via Santa Fé Route."

Comparison between this and the message purporting to be from Rose distilled the conviction that the same hand was responsible for both.

Alan shrugged. So he was to be lured away from New York and Rose by this transparent trick, was he? No fear! But—he had a plan!

Promptly Alan called up the Aviation Fields at Hempstead Plains and got into communication with a gentleman answering to the surname of Coast, the same bird-man who had come to Alan's rescue with his hydroplane. Their arrangements were quickly consummated, Coast agreeing to wait for Alan with his biplane in Van Cortlandt Park from midnight till daybreak, prepared if need be to undertake a trans-continental flight.

Another man would have needed twelve hours in bed at the least to compensate for such a day; Mr. Law after three hours of sleep awakened in a lamb-like temper when called at 11:30.

At midnight he committed an act of burglarly, calmly and with determination breaking his way into the house of Seneca Trine through the area windows and basement.

Nothing hindered and none opposed him. He explored the dwelling minutely, room by room, story

by story, intent on one subject only—to find Rose Trine, or else make sure she was not there.

He negotiated the flight of steps which led to the topmost floor with extraordinary stealth, advised thereto by a sound which had theretofore been inaudible to him. Possibly the manservant whom he found snoring in a chair outside a closed door had not fallen asleep and begun to snore until the moment when Alan set foot upon the lower step of that final ascent.

Turning the head of the stairs, Alan paused, intent on this man who must somehow be disposed of before he might solve the riddle of that shut and guarded door.

Aside from actual violence no solution offered to the puzzle; and violence was abruptly forced upon him.

No sound warned him of the door that opened at his back as he stood watching the sleeping guard. A piercing shriek was the first intimation received that his presence had been discovered. A glance over-shoulder showed him the figure of a maid-servant, her mouth still wide and full of sound, and Alan fell upon the guard like a thunderbolt. The man had barely time to jump up when a fist caught him on the point of his jaw, and he returned to unconsciousness.

Backing off, Alan took a short run and flung him-

self full-force against the door. With a splintering crash it broke inward, and without dignity or decorum he sprawled on all fours into the presence of Judith Trine.

Picking himself awkwardly up, Alan flushed crimson with embarrassment to find himself confronting this woman who had come so unwillingly to accord him her love and had fought so passionately to win him from her sister.

For her part, Judith laughed mockingly.

"Poor Mr. Law! Always disappointed. Believe me, I am sorry, for once, it is I and not Rose whom you find locked up here! For I am locked up by way of punishment—thanks to my having had pity on you once too often—while my father decamped mysteriously for parts unknown."

"You don't know where he's gone, then?"

"Do you?" she asked sharply.

"In a general way, by special train to the West——"

"Taking Rose?"

"So I'm told."

The woman choked upon her anger, but quickly mastered it.

"He shall pay for this!" she asseverated.

"Your father? I wish him nothing more nor less than your enmity," Alan assured her civilly. "But since it seems that he has gone, and Rose with him, if you'll forgive me, I think I'll be going——"

"Then be advised, and take me with you."

"In what capacity, please? As enemy or—ally?"

"As ally—you're right, we can't be friends—until we overtake that special train. After that, by your leave, I'll shift for myself."

"It's not such a bad notion," he reflected, "with you under my eye, you can't do much to interfere——"

"If I promise——" she suggested.

"I'll take your word," he agreed simply. "But you're in for a lot of hardship, I'm afraid. The one way to catch up with your father is by aeroplane."

"Don't consider me as a woman when it comes to hardship."

"I've no reason to, going on what I know of you."

"Give me one minute to find my coat and hat. . . ."

The police, summoned by the maid, entered the front door as the two crept out of the area window.

CHAPTER XXXI

As a Crow Flies

ALAN had plenty of time for thought. Speech was impossible while the biplane was in motion, and it was seldom otherwise, but only infrequently at pause when the necessity for replenishing its store of oil and gasoline would force it to descend.

Between whiles the plane flew fast and high, as the crow flies, athwart the Eastern and Middle Western States.

Chicago they saw as a smudge on the northern horizon about one o'clock in the afternoon; thereafter some little time was lost in descents to ascertain the identity of the many railroad lines.

And it was some hours later, though still daylight, when they picked up the special flying like a hunted thing across the levels, on the line of the Santa Fé. Alan contrived to focus his binoculars upon the rear platform of the car and saw a white-coated figure with a black face that was watching the biplane in the same manner—that is, with glasses. It was the right train then!

And the man in the white coat was Barcus.

And hardly had he comforted himself with this assurance when the motor stopped. The aviator merely shook a weary head and muttered the words: "Engine trouble."

Swiftly the earth rose to receive the volplaning mechanism. Under Coast's admirable handling the biplane settled down on the outskirts of a city whose name Alan never learned.

Barely were they down before he was out and making his way toward the manager's office connected with the adjacent train-yard.

Judith followed him like a shadow.

Lavish disbursement of money won him his way. Within twenty minutes Alan and Judith were spinning through open country in the cab of an engine running light, with only clear track between it and the special.

The several hours that ensued before the lights of the special appeared were none too many for the task of overcoming the scruples of the engineer and fireman. But convinced (at least outwardly) that they were not dealing with a lunatic, they at length accepted his money and his promise of a life pension should they lose their jobs, and, disregarding signals, brought the light engine rapidly up toward the rear of the special.

Within a few hundred feet of the special, Alan saw first one figure hurtle over the rear rail, fall to the

tracks, and scramble off just in time to escape annihilation. A blur of white remained on the back platform, and Alan understood that Barcus had merely been clearing the way of Trine's guards. Another minute, and less than fifty feet separated the two trains. Then Alan crept out alongside of the boiler. It seemed an hour before he worked himself up to the cow-catcher, now within four feet of the rear platform of the special. On this last he could see a woman's figure, and beside her a man in a white coat, clinging for dear life to the knob of the door, holding it shut against the frantic efforts of some person inside.

Another hour of suspense dragged out—or such was the effect—while the light engine bridged these four scant feet.

At length it was feasible to attempt the thing. Rose was half over the rail of the car ahead, ready to jump. Straining forward and holding on to a bar so hot that it scorched his palm, he offered a hand to the girl on the rail.

Her hand fell confidently into it. She jumped. His arm wound round her as she landed on the platform of the cow-catcher. He heard her breathe his name, then passed her to the footway at the side. The fireman was waiting there to help her. Alan turned his attention to Barcus.

To his dismay he found that the engine was losing

ground. The space was widening as Barcus released the knob and threw himself over the rail. By a flying leap, the man gained the platform.

Then their engine ground slowly to a halt as the rear lights of the train swept from sight around a bend.

And then the engineer, backed by his fireman, started an argumentative complaint. "They hadn't bargained to be shot at with pistols," and so forth, and so forth. But while engineer and fireman were "chewing the rag like a couple of sea-lawyers," as Mr. Barcus elegantly phrased it, there came a diversion.

Revolvers began to pop once more. And they looked up the track to see the special backing down upon them, several persons on the back platform plying busy trigger-fingers all the while.

As these last threw open the platform gates and dropped to the ballast, still perforating the air with many bullets, all those under fire turned simultaneously and sought shelter at the rear of the tender. At a word from Alan, Barcus and the two girls ran on with him around the engine, and, undiscovered, made for the special now close at hand on the track ahead. It began to move forward as they reached it, but they scrambled aboard somehow. Mr. Barcus who had acted as rear-guard, or at any rate bullet-shield, for the others, heaved a heartfelt sigh as he

sat down heavily on a camp-chair and mopped his brow, while the lights of the locomotive dropped swiftly back into the gloaming. The fact that several of the figures grouped round it continued to fire their revolvers at the fast-departing special troubled him not at all.

"If any of those guys," he assured Mr. Law presently, "could hit a barn door with a Gatling gun at twenty paces—well, I wouldn't be proving myself the giddy ass I am by sticking to your ill-starred fortunes. There wouldn't be any to stick to, because you'd have been snuffed out long, long ago—with all the chances they've had to blow your fool head off!"

CHAPTER XXXII

Pullman

"COME inside," Law suggested, "and introduce me to the brakeman. I presume I've got to fix things up with him——"

"If there's really any doubt in your mind as to that," Barcus said, rising, "I don't mind telling you you're right."

"He's approachable?"

"*Is* he?" Barcus laughed. "Would I be here if he wasn't? He's so approachable he meets you at your own front door. Never in all his life has anything happened to him like this, he's already figuring on buying a house in Flatbush with the coin he's grafted off of me since we came to an understanding. Ever so often his conscience begins to reproach him, and that's my high-sign to dig and come through."

He paused as Alan entered the car before him and was greeted by a storm of vituperation that fairly blistered the panels of the Pullman. Mr. Seneca Trine, helpless in his invalid chair, was celebrating this introduction to the young man whom he had

never before seen but whose life he had schemed to take these many years. His heavy voice boomed and echoed through the car like the sounding of a tocsin. . . .

Alan made no effort to respond, but listened with his head critically to one side and an exasperating expression of deep interest informing his countenance until Mr. Trine was out of breath and vitriol; when the younger man bowed with the slightest shade of mockery in his manner and waved a tolerant hand to Barcus.

"He has, no doubt," Alan inquired, "his own private cell aboard this car?"

"Yas, suh," Barcus agreed, aping well the manners of his apparent caste and colour. "Ain't dat de troof?" he chuckled.

"Take him away, then," Alan requested wearily—"if you please."

"Yas, suh," Barcus replied, with nimble alacrity, seizing the back of the wheeled chair and swinging it around for a spin up the length of the car.

Before Trine had recovered enough to curse him properly, the door to his drawing-room was closed and Barcus was ambling back down the aisle.

His grin of relish at this turning of the tables on the monomaniac proved, however, short-lived. It erased itself in a twinkling when Judith shouldered roughly past him, wearing a sullen and forbidding

countenance, and flung herself into the drawing-room with her father.

"Storm signals," mused Mr. Barcus. "What possessed our dear friend to bring that tigress along, I'd like to know. He might as well have loaded himself down with a five-gallon can of nitro-glycerine."

The cause of her temper was not far to seek: at the far end of the car Alan was bending solicitously over the chair in which Rose was resting. One of his arms was around her shoulder. Her face was lifted confidently to his.

Mr. Barcus saw no more. He turned delicately away, and set himself to round out two of the compartments formerly dedicated to the uses of Trine's creatures, preparing them for the accommodation of Rose and Alan. Judith, he decided, might shift for herself; he owed that young woman nothing—or, if anything, a dozen or so narrow squeaks for her life, such as those to which she had gratuitously treated him.

He mused morosely on his apprehension of trouble a-brew, simmering over the waxing fire of that strange woman's jealousy. He didn't like the prospect at all. If only Alan and Rose had not been so desperately in love that they couldn't keep away from one another! If only Alan had been sensible enough to outwit the woman and leave her behind when he

started in pursuit of the special! If only there had not been that light engine in pursuit—as Barcus firmly believed it must be—loaded to the guards with Trine's unscrupulous hirelings!

No telling when they might not catch up!

The fear of this last catastrophe worked, together with his fears of Judith, to make that night almost a sleepless one for Barcus. He spent it in a chair whence he could watch both the door to the compartment Judith had chosen for her own (formerly Marrophat's room) and the endless ribbons of steel that swept beneath the trucks, and, shining fugitively in the light from the observation platform, streamed away into the darkness astern.

But nothing happened. He napped uneasily from time to time, waking with a start of fright, but only to find nothing amiss. Ever Judith stopped behind that closed door, and ever the track behind was innocent of the glare of a pursuing headlight.

Later he had cause to believe that Judith, during one of his cat-naps, had stolen out of that door and had managed to get into most effective communication with the engine-crew and brakeman. Unquestionably these three had been quite content with Alan's liberal-handed contributions to their bank-accounts up to that hour. Furthermore, they had his promise of a munificent reward if they finished the run to California, to say nothing of the word of

Law, son of the railroad builder, that they would be protected in event of losing their jobs through any contingency of this mad adventure.

Certainly, Barcus thought afterward, nothing but a greater bid from Trine, through Judith, substantiated by a heavy advance on account, could have won their allegiance from Alan. . . .

Whether Judith was responsible or not, this is what happened in the course of the next morning: the special was forced to take a siding to make way for the California Limited Eastbound; and when this had passed, the engine of the special coughed apologetically and pulled swiftly out, leaving the Pullman stalled on the siding.

From the rear of the tender the brakeman and fireman waved affecting farewells to the indignant faces of Alan and Barcus when they showed in the front doorway.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Hand-car

"WELL!" Mr. Barcus broke a silence whose eloquence may not be translated in print. "Can you beat it?"

"Not with this outfit," Alan admitted gloomily.

"But, damn it! We've got to!"

"Profanity—even yours, my friend—won't make this Pullman move without an engine."

"All the same we can't stop here waiting for that gang of things to return in the light engine and cut our blessed throats."

Mr. Law answered this unanswerable contention only with a shrug. Then, stepping out on the forward platform of the Pullman, he cast a hopeless eye over the landscape. Then he lowered his gaze to the tracks and siding—and started sharply.

"Eh, what now?" Barcus inquired.

"Some thoughtful body has left an old hand-car over there in the ditch," Alan replied. "Maybe it isn't beyond service—looks as if it might work. Come along and lend me a hand."

THE DRUNKEN GUIDE BETRAYED HIS IDENTITY TO ROSE.

IT WAS A STRANGE MEETING BETWEEN THE SISTERS.

SLOWLY THE INDIAN CREPT UPON THE UNCONSCIOUS MAN.

"Half a minute," Barcus answered, dodging suddenly back into the car.

When he reappeared, after some five minutes, Rose accompanied him, and Barcus was smiling.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, old top," he explained, "but I was smitten with an inspiration. There didn't seem to be any sense in letting the amiable Judith loose upon this fair land, so I found a coil of wire in the porter's closet and wired the handle of the drawing-room door fast to the bars across the aisle. It'll take her some time to get out."

"What about the window?"

"It doesn't open wide enough for anybody but a living skeleton to get through."

"You don't yet know the lady," said Alan with grim foreboding.

Ten minutes more had passed before the two grimy and perspiring gentlemen succeeded in placing the hand-car upon the tracks. Far back along the line a locomotive hooted mournfully.

"That's a freight whistle," Barcus advised, helping Rose aboard the hand-car.

"Maybe you can distinguish the whistle of a freight-car locomotive from that of a passenger-train engine. I don't say you can't, but I'll take no chance on your judgment being good. Hop aboard here, if you're coming with us!"

Groaning soulfully, Barcus hopped aboard.

"It isn't the hard work I mind," he explained, laying hold of the handle-bar; "it's my silly pride, it's this swift descent from the sublime to the utilitarian that irks me. Think of it: yesterday a Pullman porter, to-day a donkey engine!"

None the less, he put a willing back into the work. Slowly the hand-car gathered momentum and surged noisily up the track as Alan and Barcus, on opposite sides of the handle-bar, alternately rose and fell back; slowly it mounted the slight grade to the bend in the track, rounded it, lost sight of the stalled Pullman on the siding, and began to move more swiftly on a moderate down-grade.

Behind it the thunder of an approaching train grew momentarily in volume. But just as Alan was about to advocate leaving the tracks to clear the way for the train, its rumble began to diminish and gradually was stilled.

"What do you make of that?" Alan panted.

"The freight has taken the siding to wait for some through train to pass. We'll have to look sharp and be ready to jump."

Five minutes later a second whistle, of a different tone, startled them.

"Afraid it's all up with us now," Alan groaned, "that sounded precisely like the whistle of the light engine."

"Sure it did!" Barcus agreed. "It wouldn't be

us if we had any better luck. The saints be praised for this down-grade!"

The hand-car made a very fair pace, at the urge of the two, and the grade was happily long, turning and twisting like a snake through the hills.

Moreover, it seemed that the light engine had stopped at the siding long enough to couple up Trine's Pullman. It was fully a quarter of an hour before a growing rumble warned the trio on the hand-car, just as it gained the end of the grade. At this point discovery of the switch of a spur-line that shot off southward into the hills furnished Alan with an inspiration.

Stopping the hand-car after it had jolted over the frogs, he jumped down, set the switch to shunt the pursuit off upon the spur, and leaped back upon the car. Meeting his eye, Barcus nodded his approval. The stratagem served them. The special took the switch without pause, and the roar of its progress, shut off by an intervening mountain, was suddenly stilled to a murmur.

But even so there was neither rest for the weary nor much excuse for self-congratulation: the rumble of the special was not altogether lost to hearing when the thunder of the freight drowned it out.

Then Alan stood up and signed to Barcus to imitate his example.

"Jump off—leave the hand-car where it is—they'll have to stop to clear it off the track."

"And then——"

"I'll buy a lift from them," Alan promised. "It's our only hope. We can't keep up this heart-breaking business forever, and it can't be long before Trine and Marrophat discover their mistake!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

Caboose

SO GREAT is the power of money that it was not more than ten minutes before Rose was settled to rest in such comfort as the caboose on the end of the freight train afforded, while Alan and Barcus sat within its doorway and smoked, mutely speculating on the length of time that would elapse before the special train again appeared, and whether they dared hope its occupants would fail to notice the abandoned hand-car and draw the logical inference.

An hour passed without event, and evening drew its shades athwart the barren and inhospitable wastes of tumbled hills and arid plains. All seemed well, and no one aboard the freight suspected that, in the box-car next forward of the caboose, a woman in man's clothing lay perdue, chuckling impishly to herself in anticipation of the time and event she was biding with such patience as she could muster—time and event alike being hidden from her understanding.

Oh, most assuredly the time would come! Mark how events had already played into her hands, how Barcus had held her prisoner in the compartment

long enough to permit her hurriedly to change from her proper dress to a suit of Marrophat's; how she had finally managed to wriggle out of the broken window without being injured; how her father had welcomed her and taken her donning that attire in earnest of her vow to him never again to weaken in the business he required of her; how the freight, pausing at the siding, had afforded her an opportunity to board it unseen—the very train upon which her enemies now rested in fancied security!

And already she had a plan . . .

Conning it, she hugged herself in malicious glee, blinding herself deliberately to the hideous business that might attend her success, forcing herself to remember one thing only—the pledge she had renewed on her knees to her father.

The whistle of a locomotive overtaking the freight sounded the signal for her to take action. Rising, she glanced out of the open door. A curve in the track below the freight, labouring slowly up a steep grade, enabled her to catch a glimpse of a headlight followed by a string of lighted windows—the special, beyond a doubt.

Without hesitation, since the train was not running at speed, she dropped out to the ballast, wheeled about, caught the hand-bar at the end of the box-car as it passed, and swung herself up between it and the caboose. Climbing to the top of the box-car, she

peered through the gloaming and discerned two heads protruding from the windows of the special's engine, one on either side.

At a venture she snatched off her coat and waved it in the air. An arm answered the signal from one window of the pursuing locomotive.

Marrophat, of course!

She turned and peered ahead. The freight was approaching a trestle that spanned a wide and shallow gully. So much the better!

Dropping down again between the cars, she set herself to uncoupling the caboose. In this she was successful just as the last car rolled out on the trestle.

Its own impetus carried the caboose to the middle of the trestle before it stopped. As this happened, Alan and Barcus, already warned by the slowing down of the car, and alive to the fact that the special was in pursuit, leaped out upon the ties and helped Rose to alight.

Already the last of the freight was whisking off the trestle. And behind them the special was plunging forward at unabated speed. There was no time to reach either end of the trestle.

With common impulse the two men glanced down to the bottom of the gully, then looked at each other with eyes informed by common inspiration.

Barcus announced in a breath: "Thirty-feet, not more."

Alan replied: "Can you hold the weight of the two of us for half a minute?"

Barcus shrugged: "I can try. We might as well—even if I can't."

While speaking, he was lowering himself between the ties.

"All right," he announced briefly.

With a word to Rose, Alan slipped down beside Barcus, shifted his hold to the body of the latter, and climbed down over him until he was supported solely by the grasp of his two hands on Barcus's ankles. Instantly Rose followed him, slipping down over the two men till she in turn hung by her grasp on Alan's ankles. Then she released her hold and dropped the balance of the distance to the ground, a scant ten feet, landing without injury.

A thought later Alan dropped lightly at her side, staggered a trifle, recovered, and dragged her out of the way. Then Barcus fell heavily and went upon his back, but immediately picked himself up and joined the others in a scramble for safety.

Overhead the special engine struck the caboose with a crash like the explosion of a cannon. It collapsed like a thing of pasteboard, and a shower of timbers, splinters, and broken iron rained about the heads of the fugitives.

But the gods smiled upon them for their courage —they escaped without a scratch.

CHAPTER XXXV

Detail

A PLATFORM, a siding, a water-tank, a Wells-Fargo office, and a telegraph and ticket office, backed by three rough frame buildings, that is Detail on the Santa Fé.

Shortly after nightfall the steel ribbons of the Santa Fé began to hum. A headlight peered suspiciously round a shoulder of the eastern range, took heart of courage to find the plain still wrapped in peace, and trudged stolidly toward Detail, the engine, whose eye it was, pulling after it a string of freight cars, both flat and box.

At Detail the train paused. Its crew alighted and engaged in animated argument. Detail gathered that the excitement was due to the unaccountable disappearance of the caboose: none seemed to have any notion as to how it could have broken loose, yet missing it conspicuously was.

In the pause that followed, while a report was telegraphed to headquarters and instructions returned to proceed without delay, one of the trainmen spied a boyish figure lurking in the open door

of an empty box-car. Cunningly boarding this car from the opposite side, the trainman caught the skulker unawares, and booted him vaingloriously into the night.

Shortly after the freight train had gone on its way a second headlight appeared in the east, swept swiftly across the plain, stopped at Detail an instant, and then proceeded to back onto the siding.

The second bird of passage proved to be a locomotive drawing a single car—a Pullman.

As the Pullman jolted across the frogs, however, the brakeman, interposing himself between it and the tender, released the coupling.

By the time that the Pullman had come to a full stop on the siding the locomotive was swinging westward like a scared jackrabbit. Then three men appeared on the Pullman's platform and shook impotent fists in the direction taken by the fugitive engine.

At the sound of a voice calling from the interior of the car—a voice strangely sonorous of tone—the three men ran back into the car and reported, with countenances variously apologetic, to a man wrapped in a steamer-rug and a cloud of fury.

While this was taking place, the person of boyish appearance, who had been keeping aloof and inconspicuous in the background of Detail ever since that unhappy affair with the trainman, stole up to the rear of the stalled Pullman, climbed aboard, and un-

ceremoniously interrupted the conference just as the invalid was polishing off a rude but honest opinion of the intellectual calibre of one of the three, named Marrophat, who figured as his right-hand man and familiar genius.

"Amen to that!" the boyish person ejaculated. "There's many a true word spoken in wrath, Mr. Marrophat. Father forgot only one thing—your masterly way with a revolver. There's something downright uncanny in the way you can hit anything but what you aim at!"

To this Mr. Marrophat found nothing to say, but there was great eloquence in his manner of performing one of the minor gestures in the repertoire of every properly barefaced scoundrel—the trick known as biting the lip.

"Judith!" exclaimed the invalid. "Where did you drop from?"

"From that freight," Judith explained carelessly, neglecting to elucidate the exact fashion of drop. "I judged you'd be along presently, and thought I'd like to learn the news. Well, what luck?"

Her father shrugged with his one movable shoulder. The others shuffled uneasily.

"None?" Judith interpreted. "You don't mean to tell me that after I had cast the caboose loose on the middle of that trestle you didn't have the nerve to go through with the business!"

"We went through with it all right," replied Marrophat defensively, "but as usual they were too quick for us. They jumped out and dropped off the trestle before our engine hit the caboose. We smashed that to kindling wood, but they got away. It was dark and no telling which way they had run. We did our best," Marrophat continued. "We can't be blamed if something—somehow—always happens to tip the others off."

The girl swung to face him with blazing eyes. "Just what does that mean?" she demanded in a dangerous voice. But her eyes just then travelled past the person of Mr. Marrophat to the doorway of the drawing-room, and found it framing a stranger, a man of such huge bulk that his head must bow to pass beneath the lintel, while his shoulders all but touched both jambs. A heavy Colt's .45 hung level in his either hand.

"Excuse me, friends," he offered in a lazy, semi-humorous drawl. "It pains me considerable to butt in on this happy family gathering, but business is business, and I got to ask you all to please put up your hands!"

There was little to choose between the alacrity with which nine hands were elevated; but one, the right hand of the invalid, remained motionless. And this the intruder indicated with a significant jerk of one revolver.

"You, too, mister," he advised. "I'm sorry to, judge you're sickly, but I can't afford to play no favourites! Both hands is what I meant."

"Shoot," said the invalid, "if you like. The hand is paralyzed, even fear of death cannot move it. What do you want?"

"Why," drawled the bandit, "nothing in particular, only your cash. Shell out, if you please."

"One minute," the invalid interposed. "I guarantee you shall be amply satisfied. I give you my word—the word of Seneca Trine."

The eyes of the bandit widened. "No? Is that so? Seneca Trine, the railroad king? You ought to be able to pay something handsome——"

"I'll pay you far more handsomely than you dream of if you'll do as I wish," Trine interrupted. "Do me the service I wish, and name your price, whatever it is, you shall have it! What's the life of a man worth in this neck of the woods?"

"How much you got?"

"I'll pay you ten thousand dollars for the life of the man I will name."

"Give me a thousand on account," said the other, "and a paper saying you'll pay me nineteen thousand more in exchange for one dead man, properly identified as the one you want, and your man's as good as dead this minute."

"Jimmy, find a thousand dollars for this gentle-

man. Make out the paper he indicates for the balance, and I'll sign it."

"Ain't you powerful trustful, Mr. Trine? How do you know I'll do anything more'n pocket that thousand and fade delicately away."

"My daughter and this gentleman, Mr. Marrophat, will accompany you."

"Oh, that's the way of it, is it?"

"Precisely!" Trine snapped.

"All right," he agreed at length, after a surprised recognition of Judith's femininity and a deliberately admiring review of her charms, "you're on as aforesaid."

"Name?" interjected the secretary.

"Slade," said the bandit, "James Slade, commonly known as Hopi Jim. That's me."

"Then attend closely, Mr. Slade," said Trine. "The man whose life I want is named Alan Law. He is running away with my daughter Rose, accompanied by a person named Barcus disguised as a Pullman porter——"

"The three of them having recently escaped from a train wreck up yonder on the trestle?" Hopi Jim interposed.

"You've met them?" Judith demanded.

"About an hour ago," Hopi Jim replied, "a good ways down the road. They stopped and asked where they could get put up for the night. I directed

them on to Mesa, down in the Painted Hills yonder."

Hopi Jim drifted away into the desert night, to return soon with horses and an assistant—one "Texas"—for whose utter innocence of scruples Mr. Slade unhesitatingly vouched.

CHAPTER XXXVI

The Painted Hills

IN THE first rush of golden day the party came quietly into the town of Mesa, riding slowly in order that the noise of their approach might not warn the fugitives, whom Hopi asserted confidently would still be sound asleep in the accommodations offered by the town's one hotel.

It was to be termed a town only in courtesy, this Mesa: a straggling street of shacks, the halfway station between the railroad and the mining-camps secreted in the fastnesses of the Painted Hills, camps now abandoned, their very names faded out of the memory of mankind.

Midway in this string of edifices the hotel stood, an unpainted wooden edifice, mainly veranda and barroom as to its lower floor. Judith watched the windows of the second floor, and she alone of the four detected the face at one of them that showed for one brief instant and then was gone. It was the face of Alan Law.

Alighting with every precaution to avoid noise, the party left its horses "hitched to the ground" and

SHE HELD THE "DEATH SIGN" IN HER HAND.

ALAN AND ROSE TAKE A DESPERATE CHANCE TO ESCAPE.

entered the hotel. Two sentences exchanged between Hopi Jim and a blear-eyed fellow behind the bar sealed their confidence with conviction: the three fugitives were guests of the house, occupying two of the three rooms that composed its upper story.

In the rush that followed up the narrow stairway Judith led with such spirit that not even Marrophat suspected her revolver was poised solely with intent to shoot his own from his hand the instant he levelled it at a human target.

Closed and locked doors confronted them, and their summons educed no response; while the first door, when broken in, discovered nothing more satisfactory than an unoccupied room, its empty bed bearing the imprint of a woman's body. From the one window, looking down the side of the house, Texas announced that the woman had not escaped by jumping out.

So it seemed that the three must have had warning of their arrival, after all, and presumably were now herded together in the adjoining room, which looked out over the veranda roof, waiting in fear and trembling for the assault that soon came.

But it met with more stubborn resistance than had been anticipated. The door had been barricaded from within. Four minutes and the united efforts of four men (including the bleary loafer of the barroom) were required to overcome its inert resistance. Even

when it was down, the room was found to be as empty as the first. But the fingers of two hands gripping the edge of the veranda roof showed the way the fugitives had flown, and these vanished instantly as the room was invaded.

Followed a swift rush of hoofs down the dusty street and a chorus of blasphemy in the hotel hallway, for Judith had headed the rush for the staircase and contrived to block it for a full half-minute by pretending to stumble and twist her ankle. In spite of that alleged injury, she never limped, and wasn't a yard behind the first who broke from the hotel, nor yet appreciably behind in vaulting to saddle.

Well up the road a cloud of dust half obscured the shapes of three who rode for their lives. The pursuit was off in a twinkling and well bunched, Marrophat's mount leading by a nose, Judith second, Hopi Jim and Texas but little in the rear. Then that happened which brought Judith's heart into her mouth. The foremost of the horses ridden by the three in flight stumbled and fell in such wise that its rider must have been crushed but for miraculous luck and agility.

Just then a puff of wind whipped the curtain of dust aside and showed the figure of a woman standing in the roadway a few feet distant from the fallen horse—Rose, who had somehow managed to fall upon her feet, waiting with a bright face of confidence

for Alan to overtake her. And Alan, who had been riding well to the rear, was abreast her in a flash.

Leaning out as he swept up, without drawing rein, the man wrapped an arm round the woman and lifted her lightly from the ground, setting her in the saddle before him in the flutter of a heartbeat. As if the added weight were but a stimulant, his horse let out its stride.

At this, Judith heard an oath muttered beside her and saw Marrophat jerking a revolver from its holster. The weapon swept up and to a level, but as the hammer fell Judith's horse cannoned heavily against the other, deflecting the bullet hopelessly. The shock of collision was so great that Marrophat kept his seat with difficulty. He turned toward Judith a face livid with rage.

Simultaneously, Judith saw Alan lean back over his horse's rump and open fire. An instant later his companion, Barcus, imitated his example.

In immediate consequence, Texas dropped reins, slumped forward over the pommel, then, losing the stirrups, pitched headlong to the ground, while Hopi Jim's horse stopped short, precipitating his rider over his head, and dropped dead.

CHAPTER XXXVII

The Up Trail

"IT WAS simply an accident," was all the satisfaction Judith would afford Marrophat in return for his insistent expostulations.

But for her, he asserted, the chase would have ended with the pressure of his finger on the trigger.

"I had him covered, I tell you!" he raved. "If you'd minded your horse, we'd be on our way back to your father now with the body of Alan Law!"

"You flatter yourself," she retorted. "What was it we were saying, only last night, about the quality of your marksmanship?"

Mumbling his indignation, the man swung his horse round and trotted off after Hopi Jim, leaving the girl to smile openly at his discomfiture.

But she smiled prematurely, for in the brief interval that elapsed before his return with Hopi Jim, Marrophat contrived to persuade the bandit that Judith had been responsible for their ill luck. As a consequence, the only information as to their purpose that she was able to extract from either man, when the pursuing party turned aside from the main trail,

some distance from Mesa, was that Hopi Jim knew a short cut through the range, via what he termed the upper trail, by which they hoped to be able to head the fugitives off before they could gain the desert on the far side of the hills.

And the trail proved rough, narrow, and tortuous, winding along the ridge-pole of an unholy wilderness. Only at long intervals did they draw rein, to permit Hopi Jim to make reconnaissance of the lower trail that threaded the valley on the far side of the ridge-pole.

Toward noon he returned in haste from the last of these surveys, and threw himself upon his horse with the advice:

"We've headed 'em! Can make it now if we ride like all get-out!"

For half an hour more they pushed on at their best speed, and at length drew rein at a point where the trail crossed the ridge and widened out upon a long, broad ledge that overhung the valley of the lower trail, with a clear drop to the latter from the brink of a good two hundred feet.

One hasty look into the valley evoked a grunt of satisfaction from Hopi Jim.

"Just in time," he asseverated. "There they come! Ten minutes more . . ."

His smile answered Marrophat's with unspeakably cruel significance.

"Texas will sleep better to-night when he knows how I've squared the deal for him!" the bandit declared.

"What are you going to do?" Judith demanded.

A gesture drew her attention to a huge boulder poised on the very lip of the chasm.

"We're going to tip that over on your friends, Miss Judith," Marrophat replied. "Simple, neat, efficient—eh? What more can you ask?"

She answered only with an irrepressible gesture of horror. Marrophat's laugh followed her as she turned away.

For some moments she strained her vision vainly. Then she made out the faintly marked line of the lower trail and caught a glimpse of three figures, mounted, toiling painfully toward the point where death awaited them.

Hastily she glanced over-shoulder. Hopi Jim and Marrophat were straining themselves against the boulder without budging it an inch, for all its apparent nicety of poise. For an instant a wild hope flashed through her mind, it was exorcised when Hopi Jim stepped back and uttered a few words of which only two—"dynamite" and "fuse" reached her ears.

Then he turned and lumbered off to a rude plank cabin which, hidden in the brush nearby, had until that moment escaped Judith's notice. He kicked

open the door, entered, and returned bringing a short length of dynamite, a coil of prepared fuse, and a small spade.

Kneeling beside the boulder he dug busily for an instant, then lodged the stick, attached the fuse, and crawling on his belly to the edge of the cliff, looked down, to carefully calculate the length of the fuse by the distance of the party down below from the spot where the rock must fall.

But while he was so engaged, and Marrophat aided him, all eager interest, Judith was taking advantage of their disregard of her.

Love had changed the nature of this woman. A fortnight since she would have applauded the scheme, callous to the hideousness of the end it was designed to compass. To-day . . . she felt a little faint and sick when she considered what might befall were she unable to give warning.

Unbuttoning her jacket, she slipped a playing-card from her pocket, a Trey of Hearts, and with a pencil scribbled on its face—"*Danger! Go back!*"

Then finding a bit of rock, she bound the card to it and approached the brink. Hopi Jim was meticulously shortening the fuse, Marrophat absorbed in watching him.

In the cañon below the three were within two minutes of the danger-point. It was no trick at all to drop the stone so that it fell within a dozen feet

of the leading horseman. She saw him dismount and pick up the warning.

At the same time Hopi Jim and Marrophat jumped up and ran back, each seizing and holding his horse. Constrained to do likewise, Judith waited with a throbbing heart. . . .

As the explosion smote dull echoes from the flanks of the Painted Hills, the boulder teetered reluctantly on the brink, then disappeared, followed by a rush of earth and gravel.

Presently, from the cañon below, a dull rumour of galloping hoofs advertised the failure of their attempt.

And then the girl made a surprising little speech to the cruelly chagrined men: "Gentlemen, I've something to say that needs your attention, likewise your respect. It is this: I am parting company with you. I am riding west by this trail. If either of you care to follow me"—the automatic flashed ominously in the sun-glare—"it will be with full knowledge of the consequences. If you are well advised, you will turn back and report your failure to my father."

She nodded curtly and swung her horse round.

"And what shall I tell your father from you?" Marrophat demanded.

"What you please," the girl replied, flashing an impish smile over-shoulder. "I am done with him as well as you."

She thrust heels into her horse's flanks and sped away at a reckless pace.

"Well," Mr. Marrophat admitted confidentially to Mr. Slade, "I'm damned!"

"And that ain't all," Mr. Slade confided in Mr. Marrophat, whipping out his own revolver, "you're being held up, too. I'll take those guns of yourn, friend, and what else you've got about you that's of value, including your hoss—and when you get back to Old Man Trine you can just tell him, with my best compliments, that I've quit the job and lit out after that daughter of hisn. She's a heap sight more attractive than nineteen thousand dollars, and not half so hard to earn."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Hopi Jim

ONCE she had lost touch with her father's creatures, the girl drew rein and went on more slowly and cautiously.

Below her, in the valley, from time to time she could discern three mounted figures. To their progress she regulated her own, abbreviating her own rests in order that they might not distance her who followed a more arduous trail.

As chance served she would scout a little distance back along the upper trail, thinking to surprise pursuit by the men she had defied. But not once did she find any sign to show that she was being followed; and by nightfall she comforted herself with the assurance that Hopi Jim and Marrophat must have guided themselves by her advice, and returned with their report to Seneca Trine.

It was within an hour of midnight when Alan's party made its last pause and camped, unconscious of the fact that, a quarter of a mile above them, a lonely woman paused when they paused and made

her own camp on the edge of a sharp declivity, choosing the spot because it afforded her a clear view of their twinkling campfire.

She made no fire of her own, but consumed the last of the provisions she had brought with her from the Pullman, then wrapped herself in a blanket and lay down to rest, her last conscious act the wafting of a kiss down to the depths whose shadows hid the man she loved.

The level shafts of the rising sun awakened her, and of a sudden she started up, surprised by the grating of footsteps on the rocks behind her.

Before she could turn she was caught and wrapped in the arms of Hopi Jim. His face of bronze bent over her, smiling in the triumph of his cunning; his breath fanned her cheek, hot with his desire; his lips threatened hers imminently. . . .

Only for an instant she remained motionless in the man's embrace. Then, without warning, she was like a steel spring that he sought to supple to his will. She fought like a wildcat, kicking, biting, tearing, scratching, sobbing, panting, despairing—and fought but the more fiercely as despair grew more dark in her consciousness.

She mustered all her strength and wits and will for one last struggle, and in a frenzied moment managed to break his hold a trifle, enough to enable

her to snatch at the pistol hanging from her belt, and present it at his head.

But it exploded harmlessly, spending its bullet on the blue of the morning sky, and in an instant it was wrested from her.

And now all hint of mercy left his eyes; remained only the glare of rage. He put forth all his strength, and Judith was as a child in his hands. In half a minute he had her helpless, in as much time more her back was breaking across his knee, while he bound her with loop after loop of his rawhide lariat. Then Hopi Jim caught her horse, and lifted the girl to its bare back, face upward, catching her hand and feet, as they fell on either flank of the animal, with more loops of that unbreakable rawhide, and placing the master-knot of the hitch that bound this human pack well beyond her reach.

She panted a prayer for mercy. He laughed, bent and kissed her brutally, and stepped back, still laughing, to admire his handiwork.

Thus he stood for an instant between the horse and the edge of the declivity, a fair mark, stark against the sky, for one who stood in the valley below, holding his rifle with eager fingers, waiting just such an opportunity as he had waited it ever since the noise of débris kicked over the edge by the struggling man and woman had drawn his attention to what was going on above.

As Alan pressed the trigger, Judith saw a look of aggrieved amazement cross the face of Hopi Jim Slade. Then he threw his hands out, reeled, stumbled at the verge, and abruptly shot from sight over the edge of the bluff.

CHAPTER XXXIX

The Man in the Shadow

TWO hundred feet if one he fell from the lip of the cliff. Then suddenly the Thing that had been Hopi Jim Slade was checked in its headlong descent by the outstanding trunk of a tree, over which it remained, doubled up, limp, horrible. . . .

The man who had compassed the bandit's death stepped back, thrust the weapon, still smoking, into the holster strapped to his thigh, and snatched up a case containing binoculars.

Not before the glasses were adjusted to his vision did he find time to respond absently to the inquiries of his two companions. Now the girl plucked at his sleeve, deflecting the glasses from the object which they were following so sedulously as it moved along the heights, a running horse with a woman bound upon its back, both sharply in silhouette against the burning blue.

"Alan," the girl demanded, "what is it? Why did you fire?"

"Judith," he affirmed with a look of poignant solicitude. "She's roped to the back of that crazy

broncho! See for yourself, one false step, and she'll be killed!"

While the girl focussed her glasses upon that speck that flew against the sky, Alan turned to the two horses hobbled nearby, and seizing a saddle threw it over the back of one.

At this the other man strode to his side and dropped a detaining hand upon his arm.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded.

Alan shook the hand off and went on with his self-appointed task.

"Go after her, Tom, of course," he replied. "What else? That animal is crazy, I tell you. Think of being carried that way—all day, perhaps—face up to this brutal sun! She'll go mad if something isn't done——"

"You've gone mad yourself already," Mr. Barcus contended darkly. "What's it to you if she does? Suppose you do succeed in rescuing her, what then? As soon as she gets on her pins, she'll try to stick a knife into you, like as not. I suppose you'd like me to call your conduct chivalry? I'll tell you what I call it—lunacy!"

"Don't be an ass," Alan responded temperately, gathering the reins together. "Who warned us yesterday in time to prevent our being crushed by that rock? Judith! Why was she separated from Marrophat and the others—alone up there when that

beast sneaked up behind her—I saw it all—and grabbed her and roped her to that broncho, if it wasn't that she had broken with them for good and all, and started to fight on our side?"

"You're raving," Barcus commented. He looked to the girl. "Rose—Miss Trine—reason with this madman——"

Dropping the glasses, the girl came swiftly and confidently to her lover's side, lifting her lips to his.

"Go, sweetheart!" she told him. "Save her if you can!"

With a look of triumph for the benefit of Mr. Barcus, Alan Law gathered Rose Trine into his arms.

With an indignant grunt, Mr. Barcus caught up the glasses and turned his back. . . .

"Go on!" he grumbled, pretending to ignore the hand Alan offered him from the saddle. "I've got no patience with you. . . . But go!" he insisted, of a sudden seizing the hand and pressing it fervently. "And God go with you, my friend!"

HE LEAPED . . . DOWN, DOWN UPON THE WATCHER BELOW.

THEIR EYES SCANNED THE HORIZON FOR AN APPROACHING SHIP.

CHAPTER XL

The Trail of Flying Hoof-prints

ALAN'S departure from camp had anticipated by a round quarter hour the appearance on the upper trail of friends of the slain bandit, to the number of four or five, who had both discovered and recovered his body, called his death murder, and pledged themselves to its avengement, laying responsibility for the putative crime at the door of the man and woman to be seen in the cañon, immediately below the scene of Hopi Jim's fall.

Between the moment when discovery of the men on the ridge trail interrupted their hurried breakfast and that which found Rose and Barcus mounted on the back of their one horse and making the best of their way down the cañon in pursuit of Alan but little time had lapsed. But for the fact that no one could pass from the upper to the lower trail nothing could have saved them. The party on the heights offered abundant testimony of its intentions by wasting its ammunition in futile attempts at long-range marksmanship.

Even with its double burden, their horse made

better time upon the lower level than those on the ridge trail. By mid-morning, when they approached the foothills that ran down to the desert, the pursuit was more than a mile in the rear and shut off to boot by a monolithic hill, while Alan was many a weary mile in advance.

He sat upon his horse, just then, at standstill upon the summit of a rounded knoll, the Painted Hills lifted up behind him, the desert before, unfolding like a map, but blurred by the heat-haze that simmered over it.

Was Judith out there, somewhere, lost, defenceless, impotent to lift a hand to shield her face from the blast of the savage sun?

Was she back there among the Painted Hills, lying still and lifeless, crushed beneath the weight of that fallen horse?

No rest for Alan till he knew. . . .

Descending the knoll, he reined his lagging mount back into the trail, following its winding course through the foothills and round the base of that monolithic mountain toward the junction with the ridge trail miles away.

It approached the hour of noon before he gained the point where the two trails joined and struck out across the desert. And here he discovered indications that the fright of Judith's horse had persisted (perhaps because of her struggles to free herself) even

to the extent of driving it out upon the desert, for the hoof-prints of a galloping horse were plainly marked, evidently fresh, and led from the other trail past its point of contact and out to lose itself in the welter of the heat.

He turned and, at the best pace he could spur from his broncho, rode into the embrace of that implacable wilderness of sun and sand. Within half an hour he had lost touch completely with the hills that crouched behind him—had forgotten them even as he had forgotten Rose and Barcus in the torments he was suffering for the sake of that strange woman who loved him and whom he did not love.

For now he was reminded that he had broken his fast neither by bite nor sup. The heat seemed to tear the very breath from his nostrils, thirst had him by the throat like a mortal enemy, giddiness assailed him intermittently.

At long intervals he would check the broncho and, feeling in the saddle, endeavour to sweep the desert with his binoculars. Ordinarily, they discovered nothing, but ever the trail of hoof-prints lured him on.

And toward the middle of the afternoon he fancied that something rewarded one such effort, something that seemed to move like a weary horse with a human figure bound to its back. He was persuaded he had gained upon the chase. And he pressed on.

But now phenomena were discernible which, had he

been more desertwise, would have made him pause before he adventured farther from those hills. The sun had taken on a coppery complexion and swam low. The air was heavy, but seemingly as hot as fire.

All this was strange and terrible to him, but he never dreamed that it foreboded anything more nearly intolerable.

All at once the surface of the desert seemed to lift and shake like the top of a canvas tent in a gale. The dust enveloped man and horse. And then darkness fell, a copper-coloured pall. Nothing remained visible beyond arm's length.

The broncho swung round, back to the blast, and refused to budge another inch.

Alan dismounted and, seizing the bridle, sought to draw the horse on with him. He wasted his strength; the animal balked, stiffened its legs, and resisted with the stubbornness of a rock; then, of a sudden, jerked its head smartly, snapped the bridle from his grasp, and scuttled away before the storm.

The bridle was barely torn from his hand before Alan lost sight of the broncho. For a moment he stood rooted in consternation as in a bog, with an arm up-thrown across his face.

Then the thought of Judith recurred. . . .

Head bended and shoulders rounded, he began to forge a way into the teeth of the sandstorm, pos-

sessed by determination not to desert her in this hour of greatest extremity, though he died of the trying.

In the end he stumbled blindly down a decline, and was conscious that he had in some way found shelter from the full force of the wind. He staggered on another yard or two, and blundered into a rough-ribbed wall of rock, whose lee it was that had created this scanty oasis of shelter from the fury that raged through the world.

He thought to rest there for a time, until the storm had spent its greatest strength; but as he laid his shoulder gratefully against the rock and scrubbed the dust from his smarting eyes, he saw what he at first conceived to be an hallucination—Judith Trine standing within a yard of him, alive, strong, free, completely mistress of herself, in no way needing the help of his generous heart and hand.

He stared incredulously, saw her open her mouth to utter a wondering cry that was nearly inaudible. Her hand fell upon his arm with the weight of unquestionable reality. Then he heard words of understanding and of gratitude:

"Alan! You came to me! You followed me, through all this——"

The bitter irony of this outcome to all his labourings and sufferings ate like an acid at his heart.

He threw off her hand with a bitter laugh—that

was like the croaking of a raven as it issued from his bone-dry throat—and in a momentary possession of hysteric madness reeled away from the woman and the shelter of the rock and delivered himself anew to the mercy of the duststorm.

CHAPTER XLI

Avalanche

WHEN Alan Law denied her and would have none of her, when he threw himself off into the storm rather than endure association with her in the shelter of the rock, Judith Trine, whose nature Love was strangely altering, swallowed her chagrin and followed him with the solicitude of one whose love can recognize no wrong in its object. Through all the remainder of that day of terror she was never far from his side, never out of touch with him, though she did not again offer to touch him after that first rebuff.

What did it matter? she asked herself. All along she had known that he could never love her, that his love was pledged to her own sister Rose. So why should she complain if he despised and rebuffed her, preferred the fury of the tempest to refuge from it in her company? Her love was no less sweet to her for that. And she could not forget that he had come in search of her, spurred inexorably by that sentiment in his nature which would not let him spare himself while a woman needed to be served.

Once it caught her in the open, the storm flew at her throat like a maddened animal that thirsted for blood. Its shriek of eldritch joy fairly deafened her. Judith was well-nigh swept off her feet, while Alan, in the weakness of his fatigue and suffering, actually staggered and was beaten to his knees.

Yet when he was warned of her approach by some subtle instinct he rose and battled blindly on. . . .

With the meekness of the strong, she made herself his shadow. And she was now the stronger, for she had had more than an hour's rest beside the water-hole which he had missed on the way of that rocky windbreak. Sooner or later his strength must fail him and he would need her: till then she was content to bide her hour.

It befell presently in startling fashion: she was not a yard behind him when he vanished abruptly. The next moment Judith herself was trembling on the crumbling brink of an arroyo of depth and width interminable in the obscurity of the duststorm. Down this, evidently, Alan had fallen.

At once she scouted along that brink until she found a spot which seemed to offer a less sheer descent, and let herself down.

Alan she found lying insensible. There was a slight cut upon his brow, a bruise about his left temple. She tore linen from her bosom, and with sparing aid from the canteen washed the cut clean

and bandaged it. Then she pillowed his head upon her lap, and bending over him made of her body an additional shelter from the swirling clouds of dust.

From the insensibility induced by that blow upon his temple the man passed quietly into slumbers of profound physical exhaustion. And for hours on end Judith nursed him there, scarce daring to move save to minister to his needs. In the course of the first hour she was once startled by the spectral vision, through the driving sheets of dust, of a horse that plodded up the arroyo bearing two riders on its back.

Weary with the weight of its double burden, it went slowly, and passed so near to Judith that she was able to recognize the features of her sister and Tom Barcus. Riding with heads bowed to the blast, they passed without seeing the fierce-eyed woman who crouched there over the body of a man who lay so still that he might have been dead.

Be sure she made never a sign to catch their attention.

This hour, at least, was hers; Rose would never grudge it to her when it had passed!

Within the next succeeding hour twilight stole athwart the desert, turning its heat to chill, its light to violet. Then night shut down upon the world. Not before that hour did the storm subside and give place to a bright, clear night of stars and moonlight.

Growing more intense, the cold eventually roused the sleeping man.

Hardly had his eyes unclosed and looked up into the eyes of Judith bending over him than he started up and out of her embrace, got unsteadily to his feet, and staggered away, with a gesture of exorcism. Hugging her new-born humility to her, Judith followed patiently, at a little distance.

Not far from where they had rested there was a break in the wall of the arroyo. Through this he scrambled painfully, the unheeded woman at his heels.

A pause there afforded both time to regain their breath and survey the desert for signs of assistance. It offered none. For leagues in any quarter it stretched without a break. The southward hills, however, seemed the nearer. They seemed to have won by now at least two thirds of the way across. And low down upon the slope of one of the hills a tiny light shone like a friendly star.

With tacit consent both turned that way, Alan leading, Judith his pertinacious shadow.

And then of a sudden she collapsed. The white world swam giddily about her, rocking like a confused sea. Her knees became as water. . . . She sank silently to the earth.

He turned and came back to her, lifted her head, and plied her in turn with the dregs of the canteen.

With a sigh and a little shiver she revived. Then, with a struggle, she sat up.

Neither spoke.

She shivered again in his arms, and he put his coat about her shoulders. It wrung her heart that he should so expose himself for her sake, yet not for worlds would she have had it otherwise.

Then they struggled on in strange, dumb companionship of misery.

Thus an hour passed, and for all their desperate struggles neither could see that the light on the mountainside was a yard nearer.

Suddenly Alan, again exhausted, dropped as if shot. Instantly she was kneeling by his side. But in the act of bending over him she drew back to stare amazed at two twin glaring eyes sweeping down upon them with all the speed attainable by a six-cylinder touring-car negotiating a trackless desert.

When Judith did move, it was not to comfort Alan. Her first act was to draw from her pocket a heavy, blunt-nosed revolver, break it at the breech, and blow its barrel clear of dust. Her hand went next to the holster on Alan's hip. From this she extracted his Colt's .45, treating it as she had the other. Then she crouched low above the man she loved, as if thinking to escape notice from the occupants of the motor-car. But the glare of the headlights fell upon

them and, as was inevitable, discovery followed. The motor-car stopped within twenty feet. Three men jumped out and ran toward them, leaving two in the car—the chauffeur and one who occupied a corner of the rear seat—an aged man with the face of a damned soul doomed for a little time to live upon this earth in the certain foreknowledge of his damnation.

Judith Trine leaped to her feet and stood over the body of Alan, a revolver poised in either hand.

"Halt!" she ordered. "Hands up!"

The three men obeyed without a moment's hesitation, her father's creatures, they knew the daughter far too well to dream of opposing her will.

In the six hands three revolvers glimmered; but at her command all three dropped to the earth.

Then, sharply, "Stand back two paces!" she required. They complied, and she pocketed their weapons.

"Now, Marrophat—and you, Hicks, pick Mr. Law up and carry him into the car. If one of you lift a finger to harm him, that one shall answer to me."

Still none ventured to dispute her. The two men designated lifted Alan Law and bore him with every care toward the motor-car.

Then the man in the rear seat lifted up a weirdly sonorous voice:

"Stop!" he cried. "Drop that man! Judith, I command you——"

"Be silent!" the girl cut in sharply. "I command here—if it's necessary to tell you."

Then the old man broke out in exasperation that waxed into fury. As well command the sea to still its voice: her father raged like the madman that he was, for the time being divested of his habitual mask of frigid heartlessness. The desperate girl turned to the third man.

"Now, Jimmy," she said crisply, "into that car—be quick—and gag him."

"If you do," the father foamed, "I'll have your life——"

The man named Jimmy hesitated between fear of the one and awe of the other; but his hesitation vanished when the girl pulled trigger and two bullets bored into the earth near his feet. Then with alacrity he jumped into the car and, ignoring the threats of the old man, proceeded to execute Judith's order.

"Now out with you!" she instructed in a tolerant tone when that task was finished and Marrophat and Hicks had placed Alan gently on the floor of the car. A flourish of her weapons gained instant indulgence of this wish.

She stepped up on the running-board and addressed the terrified chauffeur.

"Straight ahead, my man!" she said. "Make for the nearest pass through those hills yonder, and don't delay unless you're anxious for trouble."

The car began to move. The three men left in the desert made no effort to plead their cause. It was not until five minutes later that she realized what had made them so content to abide by her will.

Then she heard their voices lifted together in a howl that was quickly answered, first, by fainter yells from a distant quarter of the desert, then by a growing rumour of galloping hoofs.

The night glasses in the car afforded her glimpses of some six or seven horsemen making toward the spot where Marrophat, Hicks, and Jimmy waited beside a beacon which they had lighted.

Half a dozen sentences exchanged with the chauffeur advised her that these were horsemen from the town of Mesa who had charged themselves with the duty of avenging the death of Hopi Jim Slade, who had followed Rose and Barcus until these last eluded them in the duststorm; who had later effected a junction with the car and been purchased to the uses of her father.

The subsequent division of forces, it appeared, was due to the fact that two passes were available for escape by way of the southern hills. The horsemen had been designated to investigate and shut up the

trail toward the east, while the car with Trine had set out to perform like service in the west.

Exacting his utmost speed from the chauffeur, Judith set herself to revive Alan. With the aid of such stores of food and drink as the car carried, this was quickly accomplished. Alan was soon sitting up and taking stock of the situation as he devoured sandwiches and emptied a canteen.

Then, ignoring the fact that proximity with him threatened to end the life of Trine with a stroke of apoplexy, he stationed himself on the rear seat, kneeling, his .45 ready for use if the horsemen drew too near.

The mountain pass was about a mile distant. The light on the hillside, according to the chauffeur, was that of a prospector who had camped there temporarily. There was nothing, then, to be feared from that quarter. The horsemen, having paused to take counsel with Marrophat and his companions, had resumed their hot pursuit.

Their own case, Alan realized, was becoming desperate, the motor-car was now labouring through deeper sand, and the posse was coming up rapidly.

A long-range pistol duel was in progress before the car had covered half the remaining distance to the pass. By the time it entered this last the pursuit was not a hundred yards behind. The body of the car was struck half a dozen times, its pas-

sengers escaped only by what they chose to term a miracle.

And a minor miracle of fact was already at work in their behalf, though they were unconscious of it. Two hundred feet above the trail two men were working with desperate haste at some mysterious business, though none noticed them.

Only the chauffeur was aware of a woman running down the hillside at an angle, to intercept the car several hundred yards from the mouth of the pass. As it drew near the spot where she paused the head of the pursuing party swept into the mouth of the ravine.

And then a great explosion rent the peaceful hush of night, that till then had been profaned only by the pattering cracks of the revolver fusillade. From the side of the hill directly opposite the mouth of the pass shot forth a wide sheet of dusky flame.

As the roar of dynamite subsided the entire side of the hill slid ponderously down, choking the ravine with débris to the depth of thirty or forty feet and burying the leaders of the pursuit beyond hope of rescue.

Only an instant later the motor-car jolted to a halt, and Rose and Barcus were standing beside the door, jabbering joyful greetings mixed with incoherent explanations of the manner in which they had come to seek shelter for the night in the prospector's shack,

and, roused by the noise of firing and recognizing Alan in the car by the aid of night glasses, had with the prospector's aid hit upon this scheme of shooting a landslide in between the pursuit and its devoted quarry.

CHAPTER XLII

As in a Glass, Darkly

IT WAS a bad situation.

The chauffeur had been unable to start his engine, once he had stopped it, and reported picturesquely that forcing it through the desert sands at top speed had "just naturally plumb busted its heart." Alan's animosity could not but soften a little to the new Judith who had so evidently thrown in her lot with theirs, and whose well-timed aid that day had certainly saved him from a lingering death in the desert.

He and Judith had actually talked together almost amicably for several minutes. And it was plain to see that the gentle Rose did not relish the sight of this rapprochement.

Now Mr. Barcus was shrewdly observing an interview between Alan and Rose. And—if the evidence of his senses did not mislead him—he was witnessing their first difference of opinion. It was not an argument acute enough to deserve the name of quarrel, but undoubtedly the two were at odds upon some question—Rose insistent, Alan reluctant.

This last gave way in the end, shrugged, and returned to the car.

"I'm going back up the trail," he announced.

"Feeling the need of some little exercise, no doubt," Barcus suggested.

"Rose thinks it's dangerous to stop here," Alan began to explain, ignoring the interruption.

"Miss Rose is right, eh, Miss Judith?" Barcus interpolated.

Judith nodded darkly.

"According to our friend, the chauffeur," Alan resumed, "it's a good twenty-mile ride to the next pass and then back here. But Marrophat is capable of it —presuming his horses are—and even though we needn't look for them before morning, it would be well to put as much distance between us as possible. So I'm going to see if I can't buy burros from the prospector back there. Rose said he had some—doesn't know how many——"

"Three will be enough," Judith interposed. "I mean, don't get one for me. I'm stopping here."

"But——" Alan started to protest.

"Please! It's no good arguing, Mr. Law, I've made up my mind, I can be most helpful here, by my father's side," she asserted, and nodded at Trine with a significant smile that maddened him. "He needs me, and no harm can come to me, I'm pretty well able to take care of myself!"

At this Barcus breathed an unheard but fervent prayer of thanksgiving, whose spirit he doubted not was shared by Alan. For it stuck in the memory of Barcus that their friend the prospector (whose shack had sheltered Rose and Barcus after their transit of the desert and prior to the man-made avalanche which had afforded this temporary immunity from pursuit) had mentioned in the hearing of Rose the fact that his string of burros was limited to three. And this intelligence Rose had undoubtedly communicated to Alan.

This, then, must have been the nub of the lovers' quarrel: Rose's insistence that Judith be left behind, Alan's reluctance to consent to this lest he convict himself of the charge of ingratitude, remembering the great service his erstwhile antagonist had done him.

If only Judith might not find cause to change her mind!

Thus, the prayer of Thomas Barcus.

But one dared not trust that young woman to demean herself consistently for as long as two consecutive minutes. It would need no more than a sisterly little spat with Rose to waken the perverse demon dormant in Judith, and bring her right-about-face on the question of staying behind with her father.

Now Mr. Barcus earnestly desired that nothing of the sort should happen. In him distaste for the society

of Miss Judith amounted to a passion. His belief in the sincerity of the defiance she had thrown in her father's face was slight, his hope that it would endure until the wind changed or the moon set was nil. He set himself sedulously to divert Judith with the magic of his conversational powers, an offering indifferently received. He was still blithely gossiping when Judith flung away to her sister's side.

The ensuing quarrel seemed the more portentous in view of the restraint imposed upon themselves by both parties thereto; they were at pains not to betray the all-too-patient subject of their dispute, so thoughtfully modulating their accents that never a word was audible to Barcus.

He believed, however, that a crisis impended when the tinkle of mule-bells sounded down the cañon road. Judith's ears were as quick as his own, she, too, had caught the sound of bells behind the base of the hill. And of a sudden, without another word, she turned and flung away into the thickets of undergrowth that masked the cañon to either side of the wagon-trail. In a twinkling she had lost herself to view. . . .

The remainder of that business was transacted rapidly enough. There were no preparations to be made, once Alan had ridden up with his three burros, nothing remained but to mount and make off. Farewells were not for Trine, though Barcus didn't neg-

lect to shake a leg at him before kicking his burro into motion. As for Judith, she kept herself invisible; and though he looked about for her, Alan was sensitive to Rose's tensity of emotion and forebore to aggravate it by open search or calling.

Five minutes after his return the three had ridden out of sight of the motor-car. In as much time more they had found the forking of the trails described by the chauffeur; and by tacit consent, none questioning the move, struck off on what the chauffeur had termed the up-trail—the town of Mesquite, whatever its character and wherever it might be, their goal.

The trail mounted at a sharp grade, seldom wide enough to permit one burro to pass another at need, not seldom skirting the brink of some declivity so sheer that by common instinct the fugitives kept their eyes studiously averted from the abyss.

But the frequency of such passages bred indifference in their sleepy minds. Before morning they were all riding like so many hypnotized subjects, fatigue bearing so heavily on all their senses that none spoke or cared to speak. Broad daylight surprised them in this state, still stubbornly travelling; and shortly afterward showed them one place so perilous that it shocked them temporarily awake.

This was simply a spot where the trail came abruptly to an end on one side of a cleft in the hills quite thirty feet wide and several hundred in depth,

and was continued on the farther side, the chasm being spanned by a bridge of the simplest character —no more than a footway of boards bound together with ropes none too substantial in seeming, with another rope, breast-high, to serve as a hand-rail.

Alan tested the bridge cautiously. It bore him. He returned, helped Rose to cross, and, with her once safely on the farther side, took his life in his hands, and, aided by Barcus, unaffectedly afflicted with qualms, somehow or other persuaded the burros to cross.

After that, though the way grew more broad and easy and even showed symptoms of a decline, they had not strength enough left to sustain through another hour.

And what they thought good fortune, opportunely at this pass, brought them to a clearing dotted with the buildings of an abandoned copper mine. Not a soul was in evidence there, but the rude structures offered shelter for beast as well as man; here (so ran their sleepy thoughts) they might hide the burros and themselves for a few hours, and so obtain a little sorely needed sleep. Pursuit, if any, might overlook them, go on in ignorance of their proximity.

None but men fatigued beyond the power of coherent reasoning would have built hopes upon so preposterous a suggestion. But Rose and Barcus had known little rest since the previous dawn, while

Alan, though he had slept a few hours on the desert, had endured even heavier drains upon his vitality than either of the others. None but men in such plight could have overlooked the obvious way of making themselves secure by cutting down that sword-wide bridge so short a way behind them.

No less futile was their thought to stand watch and watch about. Barely had they made Rose as comfortable as might be upon the plank flooring of one of the sheds, and tethered the burros out of sight, when Alan collapsed as if drugged, while Barcus, who had elected himself to keep the first watch, felt sleep overcoming him like a cloud of thick darkness.

CHAPTER XLIII

Jaws of Death

AWAKENING befell Mr. Barcus in a fashion sufficiently startling to render him indifferent to the beneficial effects of some eight hours of dreamless slumber.

He discovered himself lying flat on his face, with somebody's heavy hand purposefully grinding the said face into the planks of the shed flooring. At the same time other hands were busy binding his own together by the wrists, and lashing them to the small of his back by means of cord passed round his middle, while his natural efforts to kick were hampered by the fact that his ankles had already been secured.

His hands attended to, his head was released. Promptly he lifted it and essayed a yell, an effort rendered abortive by the gag that was thrust between his teeth the instant his jaws opened. After which—barring a gratuitous kick in the ribs—he was left to his own devices.

They were limited, in the beginning, to resting as he was and listening. Sounds of retreating footsteps were all that rewarded him. Then he heard a cold

and mirthless chuckle, from some considerable distance, and calculated that he who laughed was some place in the clearing.

Now the blood of Thomas Barcus ran cold (or he thought it did, which amounts to much the same thing). For if his senses had played fair, the laugh he had heard was the laugh of Mr. Marrophat.

He twisted his head to one side and saw nothing but the wall. Twisting the other way, his effort was repaid by the discovery of Rose Trine in plight like unto his own—wrists and ankles bound, gagged into the bargain—the width of the shed between them.

But of Alan Law no sign. . . .

Tormented beyond endurance by the fears he suffered for the safety of his friend, he began painfully inching his way across the floor toward Rose, with what design, Heaven alone knows!

He had contrived to bridge the distance by half when a dark body put the sunlight of the open doorway into temporary eclipse. Another followed it. Boots clumped heavily on the flooring. Two pairs of hands seized him, one beneath the shoulders, the other beneath the knees, and he was lugged out into the sunlight, carried a considerable distance, and deposited within a few feet of the mouth of the abandoned mine just at the moment when he had satisfied himself that the purpose of his captors was to throw him into that black well.

Then he was left to himself once more, but only for a few moments: the interval ended when the two appeared again, this time bringing Rose in similar fashion. Not until she had been put down beside him did he discover that Alan was likewise a captive, trussed to a tree at some distance.

The remaining arrangements of their captors were swiftly and deftly consummated. He, after Rose, was dumped like a bale into a huge bucket, and therein by means of rope and windlass lowered to the bottom of the shaft—a descent of something like a hundred feet.

Marrophat operated the windlass, his first assistant (a boyish body never known to Barcus by any other name than Jimmy) having accompanied Rose down the shaft and waiting there to receive and dispose of Barcus and Alan in turn.

His handling of them was much like the treatment a sincere baggage-smasher accords an exceptionally heavy trunk. Barcus was partly dragged, partly thrown, tumbled, and kicked, some ten feet or so along a tunnel that struck away from the foot of the shaft, then left shoulder to shoulder with Rose, in darkness only emphasized by the feeble flicker of a candle which Jimmy had thrust into the wall of the tunnel near its mouth, while Alan was lowered, brought in, and thrown roughly down across the body of Barcus.

A hideous screeching followed, the protests of rusty and greaseless machinery. Twisting his neck, Barcus saw the dim opening of the shaft slowly closing, as if a curtain were being drawn down over it. Jimmy was closing the bulkhead door, leaving them definitely prisoners, beyond human aid.

The silence was broken by Alan's voice:

"Barcus!"

The latter grunted by way of answer, he could do no more.

"I've worked my gag loose," Alan pursued, "but my hands are tied behind my back. Are yours? Grunt once for 'yes.'"

Dutifully Barcus grunted a solitary grunt.

"Then roll over on your face and give me a chance at your bonds with my teeth."

Barcus wasted no time in obeying Alan's suggestion —then lay for upward of ten minutes with his face in the mould of the tunnel while Alan chewed and spat and chewed again at the ropes round the wrists of his friend.

It *seemed* upward of an hour before the bonds grew slack and Barcus worried a hand free, then loosed the other, removed his gag, and set hastily about freeing his friend. That took but a few instants—little more than was needed to rid Rose of her bonds.

That much accomplished, a pause of consternation followed. The darkness was absolute in the tunnel,

Jimmy having taken the candle away with him. Barcus had turned to the bulkhead and was, without the slightest hope, groping about its joints and crevices in search of some way of forcing it. . . .

"Barcus, old man, did you notice what that blackguard had fixed up?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why—at the bottom of the shaft—I got only a glimpse coming in—the door of the powder-room was open, and I saw a fuse set to the top of a keg of blasting powder. . . ."

"What's the good of that? We're fast enough as it is!"

"Simply to make assurance doubly sure by causing a cave-in. . . ."

"Why the deuce doesn't he set off his explosion if he means to?"

"Heaven only knows. Perhaps he's thought of some scheme more devilish. Perhaps he set the stage with an empty powder-keg simply to drive us mad with the strain of waiting. . . ."

"I wouldn't put that by him, either," Barcus commented. "See here, what do you know about mines?"

"Next to nothing."

"Then you've got little on me. But I seem to remember hearing or reading. some place, that tunnels have two ends. If that's true, the far end of this

ought to be the safest place when that explosion happens."

"Something in that!"

"Got any matches?" Barcus inquired.

"Never one."

"Nor I. We'll have to feel our way along. Let me lead. If I step over the brink of a pit or anything, I'll try to yell and warn you in time."

Alan caught his friend's hand and pressed it warmly, a caress eloquent of his gratitude to Barcus for taking their peril lightly, or pretending to, for the sake of Rose.

A ticklish business, that—groping their way through blackness so opaque that it seemed palpable. An elbow in the tunnel—sensed rather than felt or seen—cut them off from direct communication with the bulkhead, and at the same time opened up a shaft of daylight striking down through that pitchy darkness like a column of gold.

Cries of joy choking in their throats, they gained the spot immediately below the shaft, and looked up dazzled, to see blue sky, like a coin of Heaven's minting, far above them, at the end of a long and almost perpendicular tunnel, wide enough to permit the passage of a man's body, and lined with wooden ladders.

The end of the lowermost ladder hung within easy reach from the floor of the tunnel. But even as Alan

lifted his hands to grasp the bottom rung, the opening at the top of the shaft was temporarily obscured.

Thrilled with apprehension, he hesitated, Marrophat was up there, he little doubted; it was hardly like that fiend to overlook the ladder-shaft in preparing the tunnel to be a living tomb.

Marrophat or no Marrophat at the top, there was nothing for him to do but to grasp the ladder with a steady hand. Even though he were shot dead on emerging from the shaft, it were better than to die down there. . . .

He had climbed not more than half a dozen rungs when a few drops of water spattered his face, like heavy rain. Almost immediately the blue sky was permanently eclipsed, a cascade of water, almost a solid column, shot down the shaft with terrific force. Alan sought vainly to escape it, to mount against it. Before he knew it, his grasp had been wrenched away from the ladders and he was shooting feet first back into the tunnel.

Half drowned, he felt himself dragged out of the waterfall. Then he comprehended the fact that the tunnel was already filling; that, where they stood, it was already ankle-deep, while the water continued to fall without hint of let-up.

CHAPTER XLIV

Debacle

SCREAMING to make himself heard above the roar of the deluge, Barcus yelled in Alan's ear:

"That devil! He's found the reservoir—opened the sluice-gates—turned it into that shaft! We're done for!"

Alan had no argument with which to gainsay him. Silently getting on his feet he groped for Rose and drew her away with him, up the incline that led back to the bulkhead.

The hour that followed lived ever in his memory as an hour in hell. To die there, in the darkness, like so many noxious animals trapped in a well. . . .

The water mounted rapidly. Within five minutes it drove them back to the elbow in the tunnel, within ten it lapped their ankles as they lingered there, doubting which was the greater peril, to advance or to stand fast.

Of a sudden the thought crossed Alan's mind that Marrophat had arranged the fuse and the keg of powder solely to keep them away from the bulkhead. Now that he thought of it, he felt certain that the

AS SHE WAS DRAGGED BELOW JUDITH SNEERED AT HER SISTER

JUDITH WAS THE FIRST ONE UP THE LADDER.

powder-room had been deliberately disclosed to him by Jimmy.

Probably, then, the keg and fuse were but stage properties——

At any rate he concluded that it were better to be extinguished in the space of a second, annihilated by an explosion, than to die thus lingeringly. On this consideration, he drew Rose with him back to the bulkhead. It was solid—a crackless barrier of stout oaken planks reinforced with straps of iron.

The water was stalking them even there like an insatiable enemy. The lisp of its advancing wavelets rang in his hearing like the purring of a man-killing tiger in the darkness of a night-bound jungle. When they had been some fifteen minutes beside the bulkhead the water mounted the head of a slight rise perhaps ten feet behind them and poured down in ever-deeper volume to back up against the barrier.

It was waist-deep there before they retreated to the head of the rise. Half an hour later it was waist-deep even there, the highest spot in the tunnel.

In fifteen minutes more it had reached their chins. Holding Rose close to him, Alan kissed her lips that were as cold as death.

Then fumbling under water, he found the hand of the man at his side. . . .

. . . . . .

In the tunnel that branched off from the main-

shaft, beyond the bulkhead, some thirty minutes before this juncture, a candle had guttered in its stick, left carelessly thrust into the wall by Marrophat's lieutenant, and, guttering, had dropped a flaming wick into the little heap of bone-dry débris which blazed up against the timbering that upheld the walls of the tunnel. This timbering caught fire without delay, and in a space of time incredibly brief the flames were spreading right and left.

As Alan said a mute farewell to Rose and Barcus the fire spread out in the bottom of the shaft and invaded the powder-room. Alan had guessed aright at Marrophat's design: the keg of blasting-powder was less than an eighth full, its explosion could not possibly have effected the cave-in Alan had at first feared.

But what Marrophat had overlooked was the proximity to the keg of several sticks of dynamite, masked by a film of earth that had fallen from the crumbling walls. When the blazing fuse dropped sparks into the blasting-powder this last exploded right willingly, and the dynamite took its cue without the least delay.

The resultant detonation was terrific. The bulkhead was crushed in like an eggshell barrier, and the released flood streamed out and spread swiftly to the farthest recesses of the burning tunnel. Dense clouds of steam filled that place of terror as the fires were extinguished.

Swept with the stream Alan contrived to retain his hold round the waist of Rose. Barcus shot past him unseen in the darkness. It was not until Alan had contrived to stay himself and his almost witless burden beneath the mouth of the shaft that he discovered Barcus alive, if almost unrecognizable in his mask of mould and soot, battling back toward the shaft against the knee-deep tide.

Immediately before them dangled the hoisting bucket and rope.

Surrendering the care of Rose to Barcus, Alan climbed into the bucket and stared upward, examining the walls of the shaft for a way to the top. There was none other than the most difficult; the one feasible route was via the rope.

He lifted himself up on the rope, wound it round one leg, and began that heart-breaking climb. And somehow, by almost superhuman effort, it was eventually accomplished.

He arrived at the top of the shaft far too exhausted to show surprise when, falling in half-fainting condition within two feet of the brink, he saw Judith Trine running across the clearing.

Without her aid he would not within hours have been able to work the windlass and lift Rose and Barcus to the surface.

CHAPTER XLV

The Last Warning—and Flight

IN THE clear light of dawn four strangers straggled into Mesquite town—two weary and haggard men, two footsore and bedraggled women. One of these last was dressed in a suit of man's clothing, much the worse for wear. The other members of the party, one and all, wore the look of people who have escaped the jaws of death by the narrowest of imaginable squeaks. Their clothing, of the most rough-and-ready description though it was, had evidently at some quite recent time been sopping wet, then rough dried on its wearers; every garment was warped out of shape and caked with mud and dust. Even their hands and faces were none too clean; abortive efforts had evidently been made to erase some of the grime at a mountain stream, but lacking soap and towels the outcome had not been altogether happy.

At sight of the Mountain House—Mesquite's one carvanserai—the party betrayed slight symptoms of a more cheerful spirit: rejoicing in its promise of food and drink, and beds withal wherein to sleep, the four quickened their steps.

But of a sudden one of the women—she who wore the garments of her sex—paused, uttered a low cry athrill with terror, and clutching the arm of the man nearest her, pointed down to the card that stared up from the dust at her feet.

It was a Trey of Hearts. . . .

"Oh, what can it mean?" Rose—for it was she—whispered brokenly, clinging to her lover's arm.

"Surely you don't think. . . . Surely it must be accidental. . . . Surely it can't mean——"

"I'm afraid it does," Alan Law responded gravely, eying the front of the Mountain House. "Our luck holds inconsistently—that's all. It wouldn't be us if we didn't pick out the one place where Marrophat and Jimmy chose to stop overnight. Fortunately, it's early; I doubt they're up. With half a show we ought to be able to find some way of putting a good distance between us and this town before they waken. . . . Tom!"

But Mr. Barcus was already at his elbow, in thorough sympathy of Alan's interpretation of the significance to be attached to the card that trembled in Rose's hand.

"Sharp's the word!" he agreed. "And there's a motor-car over there, in front of the blacksmith's. Probably we can hire her——"

"Trine's car!" Alan ejaculated, recognizing the automobile at a glance. "Then he's here, as well!"

"Looks like it," Barcus admitted. "But so much the better. We'll just naturally take the darn thing off his hands, and I'll bet there isn't another car within fifty miles! We'll be well out of these mountains before he finds anything to chase us with."

But his confidence was demonstrated to be premature by the discovery, which rewarded the first cursory examination, that the car was very thoroughly out of commission.

Two minutes later, however, their earnest inquiries elicited the fact that Mesquite itself boasted two motor-cycles whose owners were not indifferent to a chance to sell them second-hand at a considerable advance on the retail list price of the machines when new.

And thus it was that, within ten minutes from Rose's discovery of that chance-flung warning in the dust, the party was again in rapid motion.

Mr. Barcus was the first to get under way, with Judith Trine occupying the extra seat over the rear wheel. And though Alan was little slower, the staccato chatter of the other motor had diminished to a merely steady drumming in the distance before the second machine began to move.

Now civilization has produced no noises more alarming and irritating than the chant of the steam riveter and the road-song of the motor-cycle.

Disturbed by the departure of the machine bearing

Barcus and Judith, Seneca Trine craned his neck and managed to glimpse through his window the second motor-cycle as it started, Alan steering, Rose in the seat behind.

And something subtly pyschological drew the gaze of his daughter toward her father's window. As they chugged past the Mountain House Alan was conscious of a startled movement behind him and a convulsive tightening of the hands that clutched his belt. Instinctively he applied all the power that the motor could generate.

Sixty seconds later a flaunting banner of dust was all that remained to remind Mesquite that Romance had passed that way—that, and a series of passionate screams emanating from the bedchamber of Seneca Trine, where the cripple lay possessed by seven devils of insensate rage.

Thus was his pleasure in the dawning of a new day ruined by the discovery that those whom he had thought to be safely entombed in the lowermost level of a flooded mine, twenty miles distant, were alive and sound and active enough to make yet another effort toward their salvation.

His screams brought attendance; but it was some time before his demands could be met and Marrophat and Jimmy roused from their heavy slumbers in adjoining chambers; and half an hour elapsed before the chauffeur, roused from his own well-earned rest,

succeeded in convincing the pair that pursuit with the motor-car was altogether out of the question until he had spent at least half the day overhauling the motor.

But the devil takes care of his own; within another half hour luck brought a casual automobile to Mesquite—a two-seated, high-power racing machine, driven by two irresponsible wayfarers who proved only too susceptible to Marrophat's offer of double the cost of the car—f. o. b. Detroit—for its immediate surrender.

The two piled out promptly, Marrophat and Jimmy jumped in, and Trine from his bedroom window sped them with a blast of blasphemy which was destined to keep his memory green in Mesquite for many a year after he had been consigned to his grave. . . .

It must have been an hour later when Alan looked back and discovered, several miles distant on the far-flung windings of the mountain road, a small crimson shape that ran like a mad thing tirelessly pursued by a cloud of tawny dust.

A motor-car of uncommon road-devouring quality, it might or might not contain Marrophat and Jimmy, once more in pursuit. Bitter experience had long since taught Alan to take no chances.

Though it was his life that they sought no later than yesterday, they had proved that if Rose were

with Alan they would include her ruthlessly in whatsoever scheme they might contemplate for his personal extermination. Nor would Tom Barcus be exempt, though Judith might be, in view of Marrophat's infatuation for the girl.

These two were far ahead and must somehow be overtaken and warned—no easy matter, since the machine which bore them was faster than Alan's, just as the racing automobile was faster than either. From its jog-trot the cycle swept into its greatest speed: *ventre-á-terre*, ears back, tail a-stream, it roared down the road at such speed as tore the very breath from the lips of those whom it carried.

Alan kept his gaze steadfast to the road, for at such frightful speed as they were now making the slightest obstruction was fraught with direst peril. Now on one hand, now on the other, now on both, the hillsides fell away in such steep declivities as almost to deserve the name of cliffs, as the road wound its serpentine way through the heart of these desolate, silent mountains.

Then catastrophe befell. . . .

Round the swelling bosom of a wooded mountainside the motor-cycle swept like a hunted hare, and without the least warning came upon Barcus and Judith, dismounted, Barcus bending over his cycle and tinkering with its motor. For an instant collision seemed unavoidable. Barcus and Judith and

the motor-cycle occupied most of the width of the road; there was little room between them and the declivity, less between them and the forest. To try to pass them on the latter side would be only to dash his brains out against the trees; while to make the attempt on the outside would be to risk leaving the road altogether and dashing off into space. . . .

It was impossible to stop the cycle. In desperation Alan chose the outside of the road; and for the space of a single heartbeat thought that he might possibly make it, but with the next realized that he would not—seeing the front wheel swing off over the lip of the slope.

At this he acted sharply and upon sheer instinct. As the cycle left the road altogether he risked a broken knee by releasing his grasp of the handle-bars and straightening out his leg and driving it down forcibly against the road bed. The effect of this was to lift him bodily from the saddle; the machine shot from beneath him like some strange projectile hurled from the bore of a great gun, and Rose crashed against him in the same fraction of a second.

Headlong they plunged as one down the hillside, struck its shelving surface a good twenty feet from the brink of the road, and, flying apart, tumbled their separate ways down the remainder of the drop and into the friendly shelter of the underbrush.

Something nearly miraculous saved them whole.

Beyond a few scratches and bruises and a severe shaking up, they escaped unharmed. And they were picking themselves up and recollecting their scattered wits when, with impetus no less terrific than their own had been, the pursuing motor-car swung round the bend and hurled itself directly at the two who remained upon the road above.

CHAPTER XLVI

Sacrifice

BUT Tom Barcus hadn't failed to profit by the warning implied in Alan's accident. Alan, he told himself, would never have run his cycle at so foolhardy a pace without good reason, and under the circumstances good reason was synonymous solely with pursuit.

He was therefore on the alert, quick to see the racing automobile when it came hurtling round the bend, and in the nick of time grasped Judith's arm and swung her back with him out of harm's way.

His motor-cycle, abandoned in the middle of the road, was struck by the motor-car and flung halfway down the enbankment, a hopeless tangle of shattered tubing and twisted wire. As the collision took place, he saw Jimmy seated beside Marrophat, who drove, swing a magazine gun round and let it off at hopeful random. The bullet lodged in a tree-trunk. Judith fired in response. But her shot flew wild, and the racing-car flew on, as if on the wings of the wind.

At first blush it seemed surprising that the car did not stop. But Barcus reminded himself that

Marrophat and Jimmy could not possibly have witnessed the accident involving Alan and Rose, who, together with the wreck of their machine, remained well-cloaked by the underbrush at the bottom of the cañon. The assassins had assumed that Alan had hurried on; and since their own first business was with him, they had done likewise, reasoning that they could return and deal with his unfortunate friend at their convenience after overhauling their quarry whose life they most coveted.

As for Rose and Alan—Heaven alone knew what had happened to them. But Barcus set himself to find out without delay. He sprang from the sheltering trees and, Judith at his heels, pelted headlong down the slope to the spot where the others had vanished. To find them practically unscathed affected that loyal soul almost to tears.

But when congratulations had been mutually exchanged, there fell an awkward pause. The eyes of the four sought one another's ruefully, each pair quick with the unuttered but inexorable inquiry: What next?

The road was now barred to them. At any moment the racer might return. They confronted the necessity of threading afoot a wild and mountainous country of whose geography they were absolutely ignorant. And time pressed, while the fatigue bred of their many hardships weighed heavily upon them all.

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It was Barcus who advanced the suggestion which was adopted, more through lack of a better than for any appeal intrinsic in the proposition.

"When we broke down, up there," he ventured, "I saw a cañon branching off from this one about a quarter of a mile over yonder. We might stroll round that way and see what its natural attractions may be, if any. It's sure a mighty poor sort of a cañon that doesn't lead anywhere—and anyway we can't be worse off than we are, and——"

"Sufficient!" Mr. Law interrupted. "Providing Rose and Judith feel equal to the effort, I'm for your suggestion."

"We must," said Judith slowly.

With a sigh, Rose nodded her agreement.

Crooking a deferential arm, Barcus offered it to Judith.

"Everything is lovely in the formal garden," he insisted; "*so* sweetly romantic. Are you game for an idle saunter, just to while the idle hours away?"

The woman found spirit enough for a smile as she tucked her hand gratefully beneath his arm.

"You're the cheerfulest soul I ever met," she said demurely. "What I'm going to do without you when, if ever, we get out of this awful business, goodness only knows."

"Let's talk of something else," he suggested hastily.

"Unless, of course," she pursued with unbroken gravity, "I marry you. . . ."

"Heaven," the young man prayed fervently "forfend!"

"That is hardly gallant——"

"I mean—Heaven forfend that you should throw yourself away!"

"Humph!" she mused. "Perhaps you're right . . . ."

Their banter was not without a subtle object, namely to reassure the girl who followed, supported by her lover's arm.

In the course of the last twenty-four hours Rose's jealousy of her sister's new-found friendliness with Alan had become acutely evident. The least courtesy which circumstances now and again demanded that he show Judith was enough to cloud the countenance of Alan's betrothed.

Nor, indeed, was Rose altogether destitute of plausible excuse for this feeling of hers. It was undeniable that between Alan and Judith a bond of sympathy had grown out of the trials and hardships they had of late suffered in common. It was undeniable, but even in his most private thoughts Alan denied it fiercely.

That her love was hopeless, Judith knew but too well. Even though Alan might not be altogether indifferent to her, his loyalty to Rose was unshakable.

And not for worlds would Rose's rival have had it otherwise. She could not have loved him as she did had he not been so immovably true. As it was, since she could not hope her love might ever be returned, she was content to love and to promise herself that, if opportunity offered, she would not prove unready to sacrifice herself to her love. At times she caught herself praying that such opportunity would soon be accorded her, and that the sacrifice it should demand would be complete. . . .

Now prayers are sometimes answered when the craved boon is good for the soul. . . .

Slowly and painfully these four toiled along an obscure trail. Above them, on the road they had abandoned, the crimson racer doubled back to the point where it had passed Judith and Barcus; its occupants descended, explored, and came presently upon the trail of the fugitives.

Bloodhounds could not have settled down upon a scent with more good-will and eagerness than Mr. Marrophat and his faithful aide. The sun was high above the cañon when the pursuit came within rifle-shot of the chase.

The spiteful crack roused the quartet from a pause of dismay due to tardy appreciation of the fact that they had penetrated almost to the end of a blind alley. According to Mr. Barcus's definition, in short, this was indeed a mighty poor sort of a cañon, since

it proved to lead nowhither; its head was a wall of rock around three hundred feet in height, closing the end of a traplike chasm.

A trap, indeed, now that the report of the rifle advised them that their retreat was cut off!

A hasty council of war armed Alan with Judith's revolver and posted him behind a boulder commanding the approaches to the chasm. The weapon, a powerful .45, had a range sufficient to numb the impetuosity of the assassins and keep them under cover and out of sight of the desperate essays the fugitives were making to compass an escape.

For in the shed behind an abandoned log-cabin—souvenir, no doubt, of some long-forgotten prospector—Barcus had unearthed a length of stout rope. He had hacked this into two equal lengths. One of these lengths he proceeded to make fast round his own waist, then round Rose's. The other he left to be similarly employed by Alan and Judith. For it was agreed that they must climb, and while the cliff offered no problem to daunt a skilled mountain-climber, it was considered best that the fugitives should be hitched up in pairs against any possibility of a slip. The manner of the pairing had been determined by the fact that Barcus boasted some experience in mountaineering, while Rose was plainly the most exhausted of the two women, the least able to help herself in an emergency.

He had worked his way, with the girl in tow, to a point about midway up the face of the cliff, following a long diagonal that provided the easiest climbing, when Alan stole back to Judith and reported that he was convinced that the pursuit had turned back—perhaps for want of ammunition. Without delay, then, following the way Barcus had chosen, he and Judith began the ascent.

Two thirds of the climb had been accomplished, and Rose and Barcus had arrived in safety at the top, before the temptation to look down proved irresistible to Alan. Immediately beneath his heels the face of the cliff was deeply hollowed out, leaving a drop of fifty feet to a shelving ledge of shale as steep as a roof, whose eaves—perhaps another fifty feet below—jutted out over another fall of a hundred feet. Alan shuddered and swallowed hard before resuming the ascent.

Another twenty feet, however, brought him to a ledge quite six feet wide, offering a broad and easy path to the summit. He gained this with a prayer of heartfelt relief, and was on the point of rising to his feet when a scream of terror from Rose, watching over the upper edge, warned him in time to enable him to snatch and grasp a knob of rock before Judith's weight suddenly tautened the rope between them and jerked Alan's legs from under him.

His feet and legs kicking the empty air beyond the

THE STRUGGLE WAS SHORT, TERRIFIC; ALAN, ROSE AND BARCUS FOUND THEMSELVES CAPTIVES.

JUDITH WAS LIMP AS THEY DRAGGED HER FROM THE SEA.

lip of the edge, he lay face downward, clutching desperately the knob of rock, praying that it might not come away in his grasp, that his grasp might hold, that Barcus might arrive in time to save them both. The rope was cutting into his waist like a dull knife. The drag of Judith's body was frightful. He could feel her swinging like a pendulum at the end of its thirty feet, and could imagine but too vividly what would happen if the rope should prove faulty.

The fall of twenty feet to the shale roof was nothing. What would follow would, however, spell death. The impact of her body would set the shale in motion, like an avalanche—and beyond the eaves was only emptiness and the boulder-strewn bed of the chasm, a hundred feet below!

The sweat poured from his face like rain. His eyes started in their sockets. The blood drummed in his ears. His fingers grew numb, his throat dry. He felt that he could not hold on another instant, when, abruptly, that torture was no more. The rope had been relieved of its burden. He heard a scream from above, then the thump of Judith's body falling on the shale, then the slithering rumble of the landslide gathering momentum . . .

Barcus at length arrived, and assisted him to a place of security. Spent and faint and sick with horror, he lay prone, shuddering.

Only the assurance of Barcus that Judith had somehow escaped being precipitated over the eaves of the shale roof gave him nerve enough to resume the climb. It was true, she lay within three yards of the brink, unstirring. She dared not stir—a single movement would set the shale bed again in motion.

Alan understood that, as Barcus asserted, she had deliberately cut the rope herself—and offered up her life to spare his own. . . .

A broad roadway ran along the top of the precipice, turning off, at a little distance to the right, to descend the mountainside. And just beyond this turning Providence had chosen to locate the camp of an hydraulic mining outfit.

Alan's appearance at the top, in fact, was coincident with the arrival at the point of half a dozen excited miners; and he had no more than voiced his demands than three of their number were hastening to procure rope and more hands. Within five minutes Alan was being lowered over the edge and down to the shale roof, on which he landed at a spot far to one side of Judith, to escape all danger of sending a second landslide down upon her.

Picking his way carefully, Alan edged along the brink, more than once saved from falling by the rope, until he stood immediately below Judith. There pausing, he tossed the end of the rope into her hands, and when she had wound it twice around her arms,

crept up to her side and helped her make it fast about her body.

His signal to the miners that all was well educed prompt response. There was a giddy interval in which the two swung perilously between heaven and earth. Then they stood once more in safety.

Supported by sympathetic hands, the quartet staggered into camp, their story, as condensed by Barcus and breathlessly confirmed by Alan, already winning them enthusiastic champions. And this was well; for in a few moments the rumble of a motor-car sounded beyond the shoulder of the hill.

A startled question elicited the information that the cliff road was only a continuation of the road they had abandoned in the cañon. The approaching car, then, could hardly be any other than that which was freighted with the men who had so long sought the death of Alan and his friend.

Startled into command of his faculties, Alan rose, took quick cognizance of such faculties for defence as the camp afforded, and issued his instructions.

Not far from the point where the road swung from the cliff to thread the camp the hydraulic nozzle was in action, its terrific force of water melting the mountainside away ton by ton. Toward this Barcus ran at top speed, gaining the men in charge of the nozzle just as the car swung round the bend.

Pausing only long enough to make certain that

there could be no mistake, and having this certainty made doubly sure by Jimmy's action in rising from his seat and firing an ill-aimed revolver at Alan, Barcus and the miner swung the nozzle round until it bore directly on the car.

The power of its stream was so great that the car was checked in its tracks; and before the water could have been shut off or the stream diverted, the machine was driven back to the very lip of the cliff and over it, taking with it those twain upon whose efforts the hope of Seneca Trine of late had been centred. A death that was merciful, in that it was instantaneous, awaited them at the foot of the cliff.

CHAPTER XLVII

The New Judith

FROM sleep as from drugged stupour Judith Trine awakened, struggling back to consciousness like some exhausted diver from the black depths of a night-bound pool. At first she could not recognize her surroundings. This chamber of rough plank walls and primitive furnishings, this hard couch she shared with her still slumbering sister Rose, the view of tree-clad mountains revealed by an open window at the bedside, conveyed nothing to her intelligence.

A formless sense of some epochal change in the habits and mental processes of a lifetime added to her confusion. Who was she herself, this strange creature who rested there so calmly by the side of Rose? . . . If she were Judith Trine, how came she to be there? The sisters had sedulously avoided association with each other ever since childhood: they had not shared the shelter of four walls overnight since time beyond the bounds of Judith's memory! What, then, had so changed them both that they should be found in such close company?

What, undeed, had become of that wild thing, Judith Trine of yesterday? Surely she had little enough in common with this Judith of to-day, in whose heart was no more room for envy, hatred, malice, or any uncharitableness, so full was it of love which, though focussed upon the person of one man, none the less embraced all the world—even her sister and successful rival.

And this was the work of Love!

She sighed, but sighed softly, that she might not disturb her sister; and in this very act of consideration emphasized the vastness of the change that had come over her. For a week ago to have roused Rose needlessly would have afforded Judith malicious delight: while to-day Judith was not only thoughtful of her sister's minor comforts, but stood prepared to sacrifice herself, to break her own heart with her own two hands, that Rose's happiness might be assured.

Now the chain of memories was complete. She recalled every incident that had marked the growth of this great love she had for Alan Law, from that first day, not yet a month old, when he had escaped the fiery death-trap she had set for him and repaid her only by risking his life anew to save her from destruction, down to this very morning, when the stream from a hydraulic nozzle had swept over the brink of a precipice the two desperate men bent upon compassing the death of her beloved.

Alan Law might now be considered safe from further persecution, since there remained not one soul loyal enough to Seneca Trine to prosecute his private war of vengeance. And though that aged monomaniac had means whereby he might purchase other scoundrels, Judith was determined that he should never again have an opportunity to do so. If there were any justice in the land—if there were any alienists capable of discriminating between Trine's apparent sanity and his deep-rooted mania—then surely not many more days should pass into history without witnessing his consignment to an institution for the criminally insane.

She, Judith, would see to that, and then. . . .

She made a small gesture of resignation to her destiny. What became of her no longer mattered, so that Alan were made happy in such happiness as he coveted.

With the utmost care she rose from the bed, crept to the door of the room (now recognized as the quarters of the foreman of the hydraulic mining outfit) and out into the room adjoining. And there, pulling the door to gently behind her, she paused and stood in tense-strung contemplation of the man she loved—Alan Law—asleep in a chair beside a table, his head pillowed on his arms.

This was leave-taking between him and her—and he would never know.

Far better so: Judith felt she could not trust herself to say farewell to him.

Like a thief she stole across the creaking floor to Alan's side, hesitated, bent her head to his and touched her lips to his cheek—a caress so slight that he slept on in ignorance of it.

Then, as she lifted her head, her bosom convulsed with silent sobs, she looked into the face of Rose.

CHAPTER XLVIII

The Old Adam

IT WAS as if the women had exchanged natures while they slept.

Rose threatened and Judith shrank!

The countenance that Rose showed her sister was a thunder-cloud rent by the lightning of her angry eyes. Her pose was like that of an animal set to spring. In her hand hung a revolver, and slowly the girl's grasp tightened upon the grip of the weapon and its muzzle lifted. Remarking this, a flash of her one-time temper quickened Judith.

"Well?" she taunted her sister. "Why don't you shoot?"

"What were you doing there?" Rose demanded.

"If you must know from me what you already know on the evidence of your eyes, I was bidding good-bye to the man I love, kissing him without his knowledge or consent before leaving him to you for good and all!"

"And so you leave him to me out of your charity! Is that it?"

"Any way you like. But if it's so intolerable to

"No," she cut him short. "I mean to tell you that Marrophat and Jimmy are dead."

"I don't believe it!" the old man screamed, aghast. "You're lying to me, you jade! You're lying——"

"I am not," she broke in coldly. "I am telling you the plain truth. . . . They caught up with us here, about noon—came up this road, shooting over the windshield. It was our life or theirs. We turned the hydraulic stream on them and washed the car over the cliff. If you don't believe me, get somebody to show you their faces."

She indicated with a gesture two forms that lay at a little distance back from the roadside, motionless beneath a sheet of canvas, the bodies of Trine's creatures, recovered by the mining gang and brought up for a Christian burial.

But Trine required no more confirmation of Judith's word. The light flickered and died in his evil old eyes; and despair followed realization that he no longer owned even one friend or creature upon whose conscienceless loyalty he might depend.

This, then, was the cruel fruition of his merciless hounding of Alan Law from the woods of northern Maine to the hills of southern California! . . .

The last bitter drop that brimmed his cup of misery was added when Alan Law himself appeared, leaving the miners' cabin in company with his betrothed—Rose now soothed and comforted, smiling

through the traces of her recent tears as she clung to her lover, nestling in the hollow of his arm. But this sight aroused Trine.

"Drive on!" he screamed to the chauffeur. "Drive on, do you hear?"

Judith had stepped up on the running-board and was eying the driver coldly, with one hand significantly resting on the butt of the weapon at her side. The car remained at a standstill.

"Where's Barcus?" Judith demanded, when, after helping Rose into the car and running back to thank their hosts, Alan returned alone to the car.

"Goodness only knows," the young man answered cheerfully. "He would insist on rambling off down the cañon in search of an alleged town where we could hire a motor-car. I daresay we'll meet him on his way back—or else asleep somewhere by the roadside!"

Taking the seat next the chauffeur, Alan gave the word to drive on, and the car slipped away from the mining-camp, saluted by cheers from the miners.

Half an hour passed without a word being spoken by any member of the party. Each was deep in his or her own especial preoccupation, Alan turning over plans for an early wedding, Rose hugging the contentment regained through her lover's protestations, Judith lost in profoundest melancholy, Trine nursing his rage, working himself up into a silent fury whose

consequences were to be more far-reaching than he dreamed.

The aged monomaniac occupied the right-hand corner of the rear seat. Thus his one able hand was next to Judith, in close juxtaposition to the revolver in the holster on her hip. Without the least warning his left hand closed upon the weapon, withdrew it, and levelled it at the back of Alan's head.

As he pulled the trigger Judith flung herself bodily upon the arm. Even so, the bullet found a goal, though in another than the intended victim. The muscular forearm of the chauffeur received it. With a shriek of pain the man released the wheel and grasped his arm.

Before Alan could move to prevent the disaster the car, running without a guiding hand, cannoned off a low embankment to the left and shot full-tilt into a shallow ditch on the right, shelling its passengers like peas from a broken pod. Alan catapulted a good twenty feet through the air and alighted with such force that he lay stunned for several moments.

When he came to he found Barcus helping him to his feet, a heavy seven-passenger touring-car halted in the roadway indicated the manner in which his friend had arrived on the scene of the accident. When damages were assessed it was found that none of the party had suffered seriously but the chauffeur and Seneca Trine himself. The former had only his

wound to show, however, while Trine lay still and senseless at a considerable distance from the wrecked automobile.

Nothing but a barely perceptible respiration and an intermittently fluttering pulse persuaded them that the flame of life was not extinct in that poor, old, pain-racked and twisted body.

CHAPTER XLIX

The Last Trump

TOWARD the evening of the third day following the motor spill, Judith sat in the deeply recessed window of a bedchamber on the second floor of a hotel situated in the heart of California's orange-growing lands.

Behind her Seneca Trine sat, apparently asleep, in a wheeled invalid chair.

There was no other occupant of the room.

Though he had lain nearly two days in coma, her father's subsequent progress toward recovery of his normal state had been rapid. Now, according to a council of surgeons and physicians who had been summoned to deliberate on his case, he was in a fair way to round out the average span of a sound man's lifetime. He had apparently suffered nothing in consequence of his accident more serious than prolonged unconsciousness. For the last twenty-four hours he had been in full possession of his faculties and (for some reason impossible for Judith to fathom) uncommonly cheerful.

From this circumstance she drew a certain sense

of mystified anxiety. Twice in the course of the morning she had caught his eye following her with a gleam of sardonic exultancy, as though he nursed some secret of extraordinary potentialities. She was oppressed by a great uneasiness.

Perhaps (she reasoned) the weather was responsible for this feeling. The day had been unconscionably hot, without a breath of air. Now, as it drew toward its close, its heat seemed to become more and more oppressive even as its light was darkened by a vast pall of inky cloud shouldering up over the mountains to the music of distant rumblings.

Within another ten minutes the man Judith loved with all her body and soul would be the husband of her sister. She had told herself she was resigned, but she was not, and she would never be. Her heart was breaking in her bosom as she sat there, listening to the ever-heavier detonations of the approaching thunderstorm and to the jubilant pealing of a great organ down below.

She had told herself that, though resigned, she could not bear to witness the ceremony. Now as the moment drew near she found herself unable to endure the strain alone.

Slowly, against her will, she rose and stole across the floor to her father's chair.

His breathing was slow and regular, beyond doubt he slept; there was no reason why she should not

leave him for ten minutes; even though he waked, it could not harm him to await her return at the end of that scant period.

She crept from the room, closed the door silently, ran down the hall, and descended by a back way, a little used staircase, to the lower hall, which was to be the scene of the marriage.

Constructed in imitation of an old Spanish Mission chapel, it contained one of the finest organs in the world; at this close range its deep-throated tones vied with the warnings of the storm. Judith, lurking in a passageway whose open door revealed the altar steps and chancel, was shaken to the very marrow of her being by the majestic reverberations of the music.

Since they had regained contact with civilization in a section of the country where the Law estate had vast holdings of land, the chapel was thronged with men and women who had known Alan's father and wished to honour his son. . . .

Above stairs, in the room Judith had quitted, Seneca Trine opened both eyes wide and laughed a silent laugh of savage triumph when the door closed behind his daughter. At last he was left to his own devices, and at a time the most fitting imaginable for what he had in mind.

With a grin, Trine raised both arms and stretched them wide apart. Then, grasping the arms of his

IT WAS A MOMENT OF AWFUL PERIL.

THEY ADVANCED CAREFULLY OVER THE TREACHEROUS BRIDGE.

chair, he lifted himself from it and stood trembling upon his own feet for the first time in almost twenty years.

Grasping the back of the wheeled chair, he used it as a crutch to guide his feeble and uncertain movements. But these became momentarily stronger and more confident.

This, then, was the secret he had hugged to his embittered bosom, a secret unsuspected even by the attending surgeon: that through the motor accident of three days ago he had regained the use of his limbs that had been stricken motionless—strangely enough, by a motor-car—nearly two decades since.

Slowly but surely moving to the bureau in the room, he opened one of its drawers and took out something he had, without her knowledge, seen Judith put away there while she thought he slept. With this hidden in the pocket of his dressing-gown, he steered a straight if very deliberate course to the door, let himself out, and like a materialized spectre of the man he once had been, navigated the corridor to the head of the broad central staircase, and step by step, clinging with both hands, negotiated the descent.

The lobby of the hotel was deserted. As the ceremony approached its end, every guest and servant in the house was crowding the doorway to the chapel. None opposed the progress of this ghastly vision in

dressing-gown and slippered feet, chuckling insanely to himself as he tottered through the empty halls and corridors, finding an almost supernatural strength to sustain him till he found himself face to face with his chosen enemy and victim.

The first that blocked his way into the chapel, a bell-boy of the hotel, looked round at the touch of the clawlike hand upon his shoulder, and shrank back with a cry of terror—a cry that was echoed from half a dozen throats within another instant. As if from the path of some grisly visitant from the world beyond the grave, the throng pressed back and cleared a way for Seneca Trine, father of the bride.

And as the way opened and he looked toward the altar and saw Alan standing hand in hand with Rose while the minister invoked a blessing upon the union that had been but that instant consummated, added strength, the strength of the insane, was given to Seneca Trine.

When Alan, annoyed by the disturbance in the body of the chapel, looked round, it was to see the aged maniac standing within a dozen feet of him; and as he cried out in wonder, Trine whipped a revolver from the pocket of his dressing-gown and swung it steadily to bear upon Alan's head.

At that instant the storm broke with infernal fury upon the land.

A crash of thunder so heavy and prolonged that it

rocked the building upon its foundations accompanied the shattering of a huge stained glass window.

A bolt of bluish flame of dazzling brilliance slashed through the window like a flaming sword and smote the pistol in the hand of Seneca Trine, discharging the weapon even as it struck him dead.

As he fell, the bolt swerved and struck two others down—Alan Law and the woman who had just been made his wife.

CHAPTER L

The Wife

AGAIN three days elapsed; and Judith, returning from the double funeral of her father and sister, doffed her mourning for a gown less sombre and more suited to the atmosphere of a sick-room, then relieved the nurse in charge of Alan.

He remained as he had been ever since the falling of the thunderbolt—in absolute coma.

But he lived, and—or the physicians lied—must soon regain consciousness.

Kneeling by his bedside, Judith prayed long and earnestly.

When she arose, it was to answer a tap upon the door. She admitted Tom Barcus and suffered him to lead her into the recess of the window, where they spoke in guarded tones.

"I've come to tell you something," Barcus announced with characteristic awkwardness. "I've known it for three days—ever since the wedding, in fact—and kept it to myself, not knowing whether I ought to tell you yet or not."

He paused, eying her uncertainly, unhappily.

"I am prepared," Judith assured him calmly.

"You couldn't be. It's the most amazing thing imaginable. . . . See here . . ."

"Well?"

"You understand, don't you, that Alan must never know that Rose was killed by that lightning stroke?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean"—the man floundered miserably—"you see, he loved her so—I thought—I'm sure it would be best—if you can bring yourself to it—to let him go on believing it wasn't Rose who was killed, but Judith. And that's skating so close to the truth that it makes no difference: the Judith Alan knew and the Judith I knew in the beginning is gone as completely as though she and not Rose had been killed."

After a long pause, the girl asked him quietly: "I understand. But don't you see that, if I were to consent to this—lend myself to a deception which I must maintain through all my life to come—Alan would consider me his wife?"

"Well, but—you see—you *are* his wife. . . . Oh, don't think I'm off my bat: I'm telling you the plain, unvarnished truth. You are Alan's wife. . . . You remember that day in New York when you substituted for Rose, when Alan tried to elope with her, and you went with him to Jersey City, and stood up to be married by a preacher-guy named

Wright—and Marrophat broke in just at the critical moment and busted up the party?"

"Well?" she demanded.

Barcus produced a folded yellow paper from his coat-pocket and proffered it.

"Read that. It was handed to me as best man just before the ceremony. Seeing it was addressed to Alan, and knowing he was in no frame of mind to be bothered by telegrams, I slipped it into my pocket and forgot all about it temporarily. When I came to find it, I took the liberty of reading it. But read it for yourself."

The typewritten lines of the message blurred and ran together almost indecipherably in Judith's vision. None the less she contrived to grasp the substance of its meaning:

"*Why didn't you wire me sooner? Marriage to Rose impossible. Rev. Mr. Wright informs me your marriage to Judith last week was completed before Marrophat interrupted. Judith legally your wife. Would have advised you sooner had you let me know where to address you. Hope to heaven this gets to you before too late.*"

The message was signed with the name of Alan's confidential man of business in New York. . . .

When Judith looked up, she was alone in the room,

but for the silent patient on his couch. Slowly, almost fearfully, she crept to his bedside and stood looking down into the face of her husband. And while she looked Alan's lashes fluttered, his respiration quickened, a faint colour crept into his pallid cheeks, and his eyes opened wide and looked into hers.

His lips moved and breathed a word of recognition: "Judith!"

With a low cry of tenderness, the girl sank to her knees and encircled his head with her arms.

"Judith," she whispered, hiding her face in his bosom, "Judith is no more. . . ."

A pause, then again the feeble voice:

"Then, if I was mistaken, if you aren't Judith, you must be Rose—my wife!"

She said steadily, "I am your wife."

His hands fumbled with her face, closed upon her cheeks, lifted her head until her eyes looked into his.

And for many minutes he held her so, looking deep into the soul of the woman.

Then quietly he said, "I *know* . . ."

THE END